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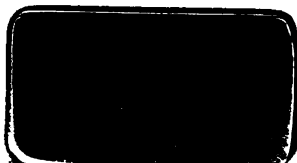
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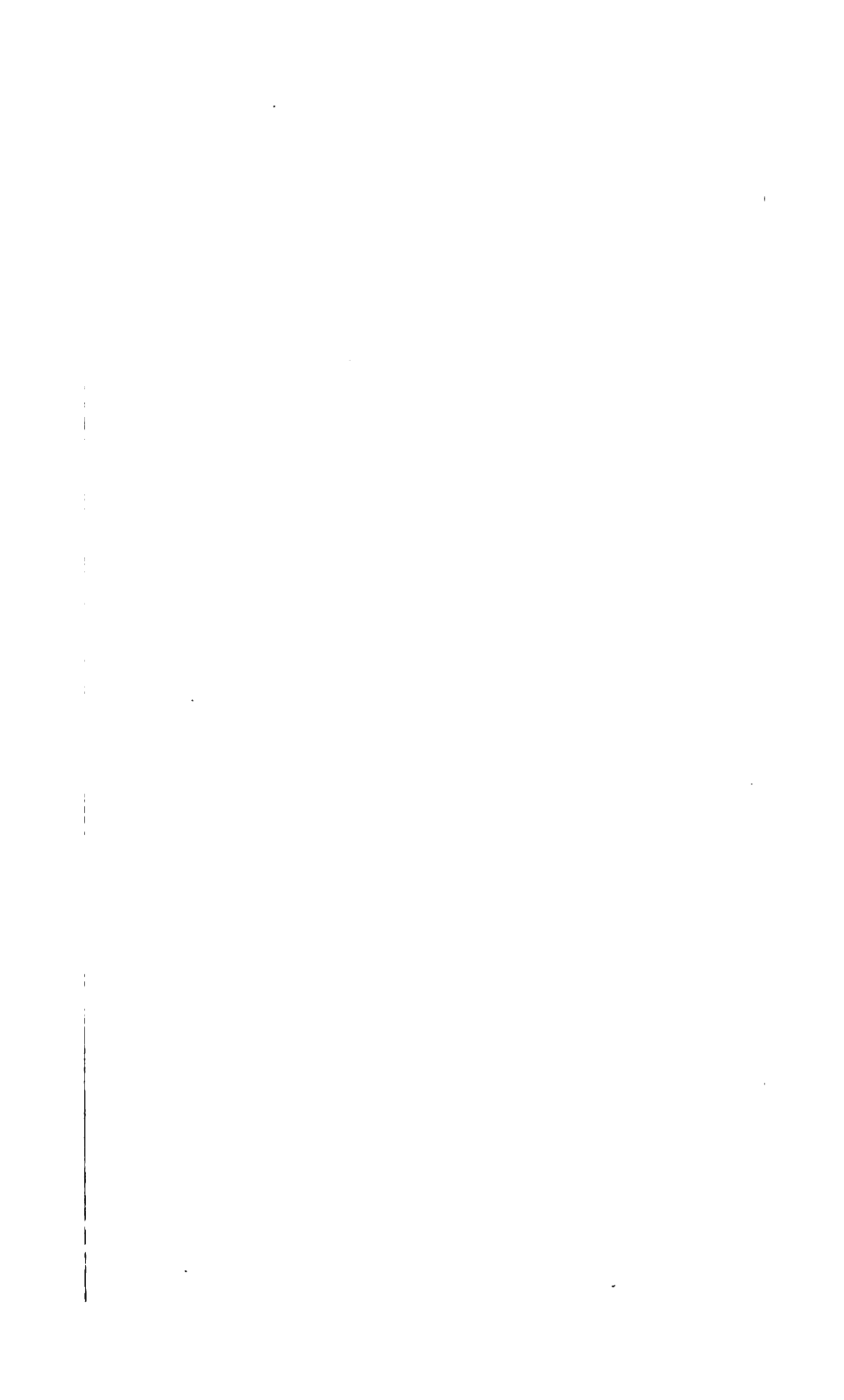
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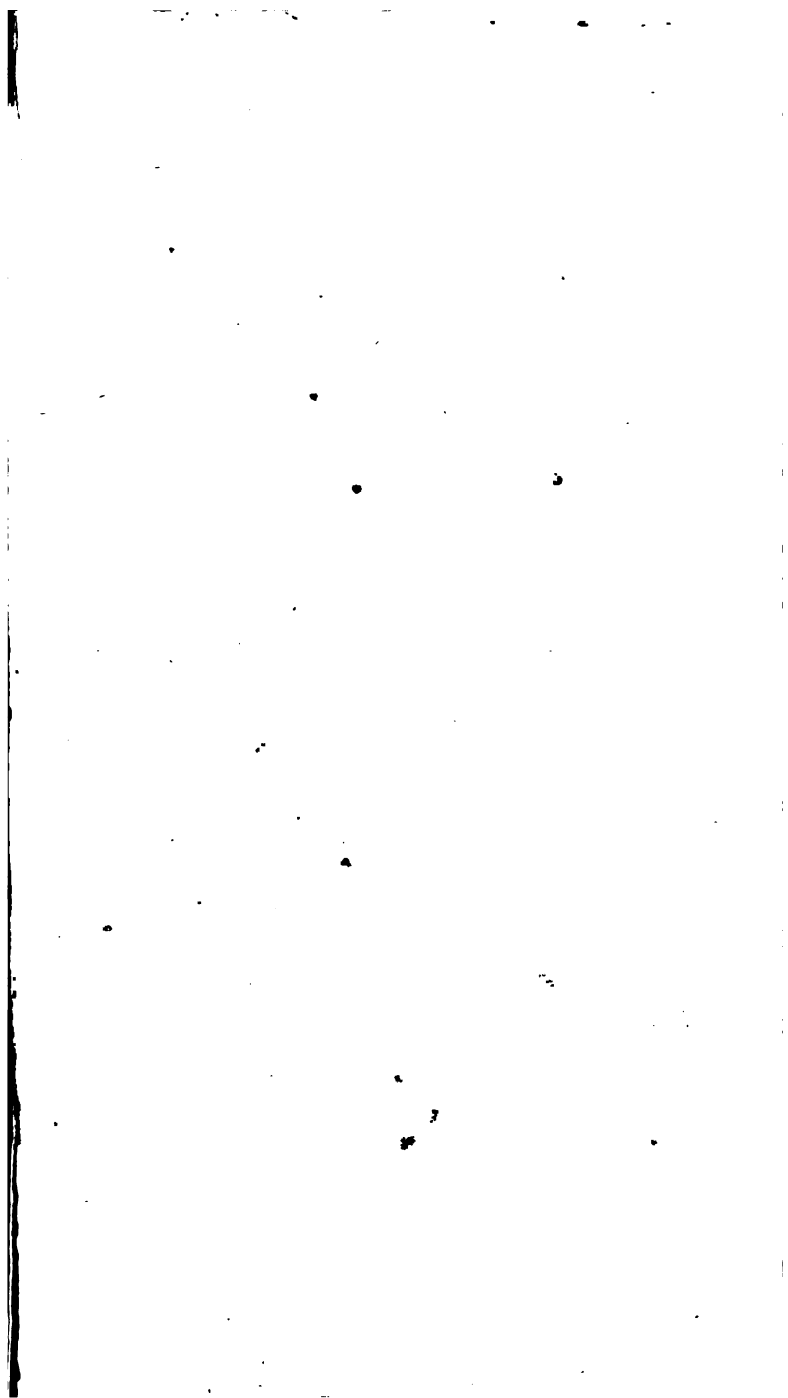


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THE
LIFE AND ADVENTURES
OF
MICHAEL ARMSTRONG,
THE FACTORY BOY.

CHAPTER I.

Description of Dowling Lodge and its Appurtenances—Of its Master—Of its Mistress—And all the Masters and Misses Dowling—A large Dinner-party—A hot Drawing-room, and the way to escape from it.

No traveller can ride or drive within sight of Dowling Lodge without being tempted to inquire “Whose house is that?”

It forms, indeed, a very striking object on the right of the London road, as the hill rises gradually, and overlooks the town of Ashleigh, one of the busiest in Lancashire, to the left: for, although the trees about the mansion are not yet of sufficient growth to make it

picturesque, its lofty portico, well-proportioned wings, and commanding site, render it an ornament to the neighbourhood for miles round.

Those who are admitted to a nearer view of the house (and, for the convenience of the public, every Wednesday is set apart for its being shown) will find still more to admire than such as see it only from a distance. It has its park and its pinery; conservatories, which cause the mercury in the thermometer, when paraded through them, to run up to the cocoa-ripening heat of the tropics, and ice-houses that would bring it down again to the temperature of Behring's Straits. It has three drawing-rooms, two dining-rooms, a great library, all full of new books; as many bedrooms, dressing-rooms, and boudoirs as a great man's house ought to have, and a study besides—Sir Matthew Dowling's own private study. This delightful little apartment is small, not more than twelve feet square; but nothing can be more agreeable and convenient. It opens by one door from the great hall of entrance, and by another communicates through a long stone passage with the offices of the mansion; enabling the knight to receive, without interruption, not only his overlookers

(Sir Matthew being the proprietor of many cotton-mills), but his coachman, gardener, bailiff, and whomever else he might wish to transact business with.

Of the fitting up of this princely mansion it is only necessary to say, that it is done in a spirit of emulative imitation, which renders it fully equal, in this respect, to the most finished private dwellings in Europe. The furniture is uniformly rich throughout; the picture-frames in the best style of art; Saxony carpets in the drawing-rooms, Turkey ditto in the dining-rooms, Brussels in the bed-rooms, and indeed not a single inch of Kidderminster anywhere, except in the garrets.

I will not attempt to state the amount of Sir Matthew Dowling's wealth; Cocker himself would have found it a laborious task to make the calculation; and it is sufficient for the gratification of all reasonable curiosity to say, that throughout the whole line of that Golconda country, which, being the busiest of the manufacturing districts, is probably the richest in the world, there was not any one who could vie in wealth with him. In a word, he shone amidst his rich neighbours like a golden sun, surrounded by silver moons.

But Sir Matthew was a superior man in all

ways. He was six feet two inches in height, and stout in proportion, with hands and feet that might have sufficed a giant. His intellectual gifts were also of no ordinary character. He liked well enough, perhaps, to stand pre-eminent in the commercial estimation of his neighbours; but so enlightened was his spirit, that he liked better still to shine before their eyes as a man of taste, a literary and accomplished gentleman, a speaker of modern languages, a critical French scholar, a playful votary of the Muses himself, and a universal Mecænas to all who wielded a pen in their service. But, beyond all else, Sir Matthew valued himself upon his reputation for the lighter graces of wit and gallantry: he sought to make himself into something of a delightful mixture between Killigrew and the Count de Grammont; and there was no receptacle of wit, from Joe Miller downwards, no gallant memoirs in an intelligible tongue, that he did not study with assiduity and perseverance of the highest order.

He was often heard to declare that he loved nothing so well as the promotion of mirth and light-heartedness among his fellow-creatures; but tragedy and comedy often walk through the world hand in hand together, and their alliance

may be traced without difficulty in the career of Sir Matthew Dowling.

The wife of this prosperous gentleman had also many admirable qualities. She was not one of the idle gossipers who delight in chattering about their own concerns to every one who will listen : she despised such weakness, and had never been heard to hint at her own parentage or early history to any one ; rightly considering that, when such matters are unceasingly discussed, they may be exceedingly likely to prevent people's minding their own business, while devoting an undue share of attention to that of others.

Nevertheless, with nice and laudable discrimination, she took care that her neighbours should be well acquainted with all such facts respecting her as it concerned them to know. There was hardly an individual within ten miles who was not aware that Lady Dowling kept two carriages, six horses, one coachman, one postilion, five gardeners, two grooms, three footmen, one butler, and a page—not to mention two nurses, four nursery-maids, and more ladies'-maids, housemaids, cookmaids, kitchen-maids, laundry-maids, still-room maids, dairy-maids, and the like, than any other lady in the

county. Neither could any be ignorant that, except in the article of jewels, her wardrobe might vie with that of any duchess in the land; and all might see, moreover, that she was comely still, both in form and feature. She conversed with great ability on all subjects connected with fashionable life; and though some few carping critics thought that she was too apt to diversify the monotony of the English language by indulging in some remarkable variations from its ordinary laws, nobody, or scarcely anybody, attempted to deny that she was on the whole a very charming woman. Such was the testimony of her general acquaintance: those who knew her better were aware that her moral qualities outshone, as they always ought to do, all her external graces. She was a faithful and exceedingly fond wife, and doated upon all her children: no woman could more heartily detest every species of light flirting airs in females; and, being deeply sensible of the dangerous attractions of youth and beauty in her own sex, she studiously avoided bringing those of her family who might suffer thereby from coming in contact with anything of the kind: so that the female portion of her establishment consisted of the

ugliest set of neat and carefully-dressed middle-aged women that ever were found assembled together.

The knight and his excellent lady were blessed with a very numerous progeny, certainly not less than eighteen or twenty; but, as they were rarely all at home together, it was at no time easy to count them.

Augustus, the eldest of the family, was a prodigiously fine young man, just returned from college. He had not indeed thought it necessary to take a degree, nor did Sir Matthew or her ladyship particularly wish it; both of them being of opinion that little distinction could be gained by the assumption of a title which was never used in society, and to which he conceived every Englishman to be eligible who could just read and write a little. But as, on all points that concerned the interest of his eldest son, Sir Matthew was too deeply interested to run any risk of blundering, he did not give his consent for the return of Augustus without his having gone through this idle academic ceremony, till he had paid a visit to the rector of his parish, to elicit from him some information on the subject.

"May I ask, sir," said Sir Matthew abruptly, "what degree you took at the university?"

Mr. Hetherington was a new incumbent, and might, perhaps, have been a little affronted at a question which, by the blunt manner of it, seemed almost to insinuate a doubt whether he had taken any degree at all; but, though a good man, and an excellent clergyman to boot, he had a strong taste for humour, and had already discovered that his neighbour at the great house was rich in more ways than one. It was, therefore, with the utmost civility that he answered, "My degree, Sir Matthew, was that of Master of Arts."

"And pray, sir, does it give you any title by which you can be distinguished as in any way a superior sort of person in society?"

"I am afraid not, Sir Matthew," was the reply.

"I thank you, sir, for your sincerity," rejoined the knight. "It was important that I should ascertain the truth on this point. You are, then, never addressed in company as Mr. Master of Arts, or anything of that kind?"

"I have never yet, Sir Matthew, met with any one of sufficient politeness to do me that honour," replied Mr. Hetherington gravely.

"And I suppose you have lived in respectable society?"

"Very decent society—very decent, Sir Mat-

thew," replied Hetherington, whose mother was the daughter of a distinguished nobleman.

"Good morning, sir; I shall be happy to see you at Dowling Lodge—that is to say, sir, if your gown does not lead you to object to elegant amusements. I love science, Mr. Hetherington, and am indeed devoted to every thing intellectual; but, notwithstanding this, I am a worshipper at the shrine of grace and wit, and could not exist among people who did not relish the lighter embellishments of society."

"I shall be happy, Sir Matthew, to share in your gayer hours, provided I am fortunate enough to find that you have no objection to profit by my graver ones," replied the clergyman.

Sir Matthew returned from this visit very well pleased with the new rector. Mr. Augustus was immediately comforted by a letter, informing him that he might call in his accounts, and prepare to leave the university as soon as he pleased; and, within ten days after receiving it, the amiable young man was restored to the bosom of his family.

Next to this primal hope of the Dowling race came three young ladies, between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one; the two

eldest of them being as like as two peas, and the third like nothing on earth but herself. Then followed several young gentlemen, who were placed at different fashionable schools; for Sir Matthew, who was a man of very enlarged mind, declared it to be his opinion and his principle, that the patronage of such a fortune as his should be extended as widely as possible. After these young gentlemen came, one after the other, with the interval of about eleven months between them, ever so many little girls, who, for the present, were all educated at home, having a particularly clever French governess. All the rest were nice little children of different degrees of babyhood; the dear little girls being remarkable for their long plaited hair, short frocks, and furbelowed trousers, and the dear little boys for the manly bustle with which they wore their Scotch bonnets and plaided tunics, which, considering that neither Sir Matthew nor his lady had ever been in Scotland in their lives, showed great enlargement of national feeling. Altogether, it was considered to be the finest family ever seen.

It happened upon a broiling day about the middle of July, during one of the hottest summers England had ever known, that Sir Mat-

thew and Lady Dowling "entertained a party of distinguished fashionables" at dinner.

It may have been remarked, by those who study such subjects, that there is a difference between a dinner-party given at such a grand mansion as that of Sir Matthew Dowling, and one at a dwelling of perhaps not a quarter the size, where the owners are of a different order of the aristocracy, having a longer pedigree and a shorter purse. At both, probably, the banquet will be a costly one, yet the one entertainment will *come off* in a manner as unlike as possible to the other. There is something in the usual way of wearing stiff new-made grandeur, not far unlike that of wearing stiff new-made clothes. Neither the one nor the other sit easily.

At this splendid dinner at Dowling Lodge the company consisted of a selection from the neighbouring families, made on the most legitimate principles of exclusiveness, no family being invited who did not drive four horses at the races. To this there were indeed two exceptions. The first was the Right Honourable Lady Clarissa Shrimpton; but this distinguished lady, though she drove only one pony instead of four horses, was considered by all the country round as the one thing needful to

render a party completely elegant. She was, indeed, neither young, handsome, nor rich, but she was Lady Clarissa, and this was enough.

The other exception was to be found in the rotund person of Dr. Crockley, who, having formerly been a celebrated quack, made a little fortune, and taken out a diploma, had lately married a beauty, and settled in the town of Ashleigh, where he was well pleased to pick up a few guinea fees, both as a public evidence of his being a real M.D., and as a private fund wherewith to indulge his still very tender passion, by buying finery for his pretty young wife.

This fat little gentleman was an especial favourite with Sir Matthew, chiefly on account of his jocund humour and ready laugh; and also, perhaps, because he had a pleasant way, peculiar to himself, of paying compliments in the bluntest and most unstudied manner possible.

But, notwithstanding the presence of all these distinguished persons, the dinner moved on very slowly. Sir Matthew, indeed, was as brilliant as it was possible for any man to be under the circumstances; and Lady Clarissa, who did not scruple to declare that she was

very partial to him, listened to all he said to her with as much attention at least as any lady could be expected to do who was making one of sixteen at a dinner where there was an equal number of dishes of hot meats reeking upon the table, and the thermometer standing at 87°. Dr. Crockley, too, laughed repeatedly ; but his laugh was like a lucifer-match that fails, just kindling and sputtering a little, but going out before it is able to communicate its light.

The very sight of the servants, as they panted round the table, was quite enough to smother and stifle all inclination for enjoyment : their shoes creaked—their faces shone—ice became water—the salad looked as if it were stewed—the cucumbers seemed to have fainted away—the prodigious turbot smelt fishy, and its attendant lobster-sauce glowed not with a deeper tint than did my Lady Dowling's cheeks as her nose caught the unfragrant gale. In short, it was a great dinner in the dog-days, and no more need be said of it.

Great was the inward satisfaction of every guest when at last Lady Dowling rose and gave signal that the party was to be divided in half. The languid ladies welcomed the

coolness of the marble hall as they passed through it, and the gentlemen gazed eagerly at the butler as he brought forward a fresh supply of claret, and a reinforcement of ice. But the enjoyment of neither party lasted long: for Lady Dowling was too grand and too solemn not to marshal all her company into her fine drawing-room, where they were all ceremoniously deposited on satin sofas, amidst swelling pillows that might have defied the frosts of January; while seven or eight hot-looking children were commanded to walk round the circle and kiss everybody.

Nor did the gentlemen fare much better; for scarcely had the drawing-room door closed after the ladies, before the shining bald head of Dr. Crockley stretched itself up nearly to a level with the long-backed Sir Matthew's breast-pin, whilst, with a very ominous sort of growl, making itself heard before his lips opened, he first preluded and then uttered the following speech,—

“ I don't like it, Sir Matthew—I don't like this business at the Weavers' Arms.”

“ What business, Doctor?” replied his friend sharply.

“ Why, this meeting, Sir Matthew. I can't get the notion of a strike out of my head.”

Every chair was drawn towards the little doctor : nobody had heard a word of it. " Well, gentlemen, perhaps I am mistaken—perhaps there has been no meeting," resumed the friendly doctor. " God knows, I don't wish to spoil the enjoyment of this delightful hour ; but at any rate, my good friends, it is as well for you to be on the look-out." Then lowering his voice, he muttered, as near to the ear of Sir Matthew as he could reach, " I know that your people are meeting, in doors and out of doors. But you are such a good, generous, kind-hearted creature, that I dare say we shall hear, before long, of your having done some d—d good-natured thing or other, and that perhaps will set all right ; who knows ?"

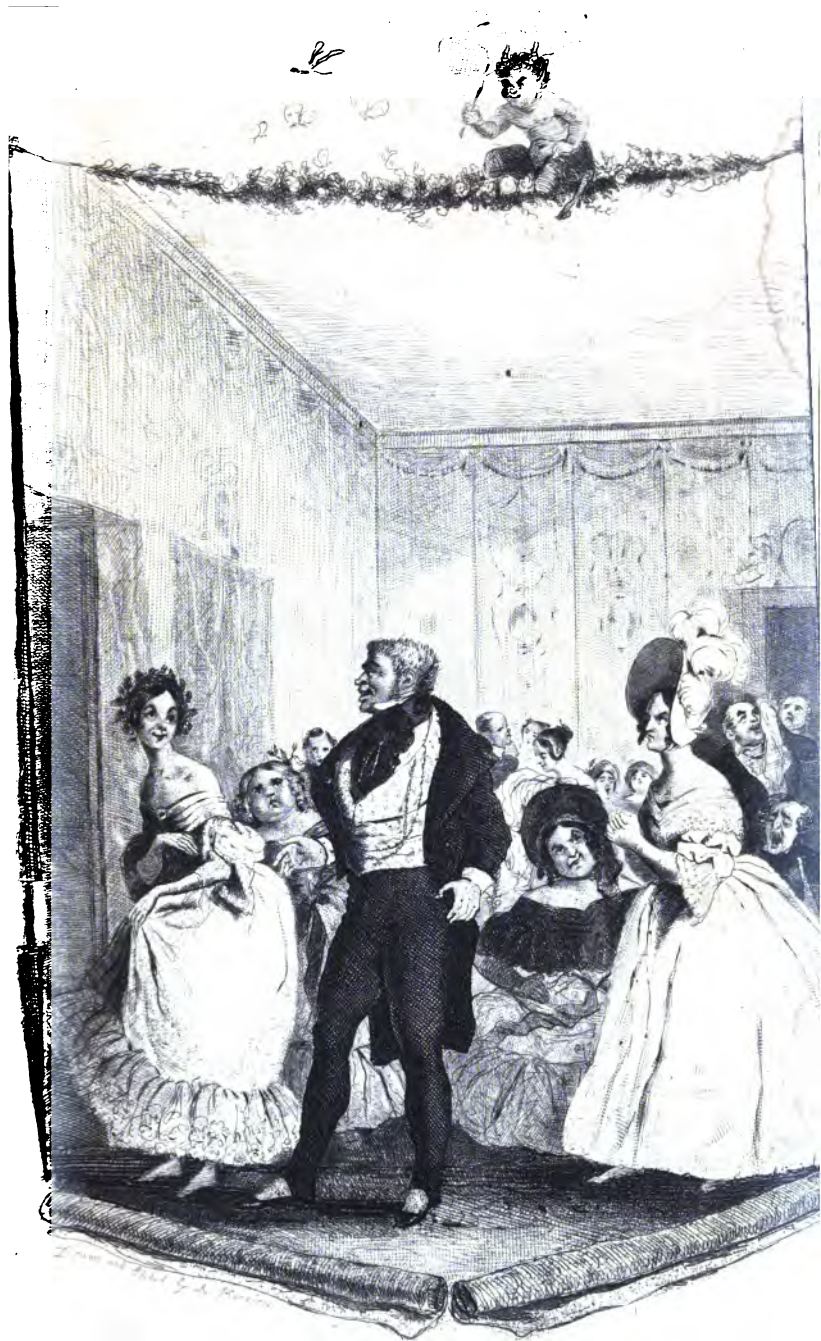
Sir Matthew gave an almost imperceptible nod, and pushed on the claret-jug ; but the gaiety of the party had been effectually checked, and it was not long before the second richest man in company (Sir Matthew of course being the first) said, " I do think and believe, Sir Matthew, that my lady's coffee would do more to cool us than your wine." The opinion was not opposed, and, much earlier than usual, the gentlemen rose, and followed the ladies.

But this movement did not appear greatly

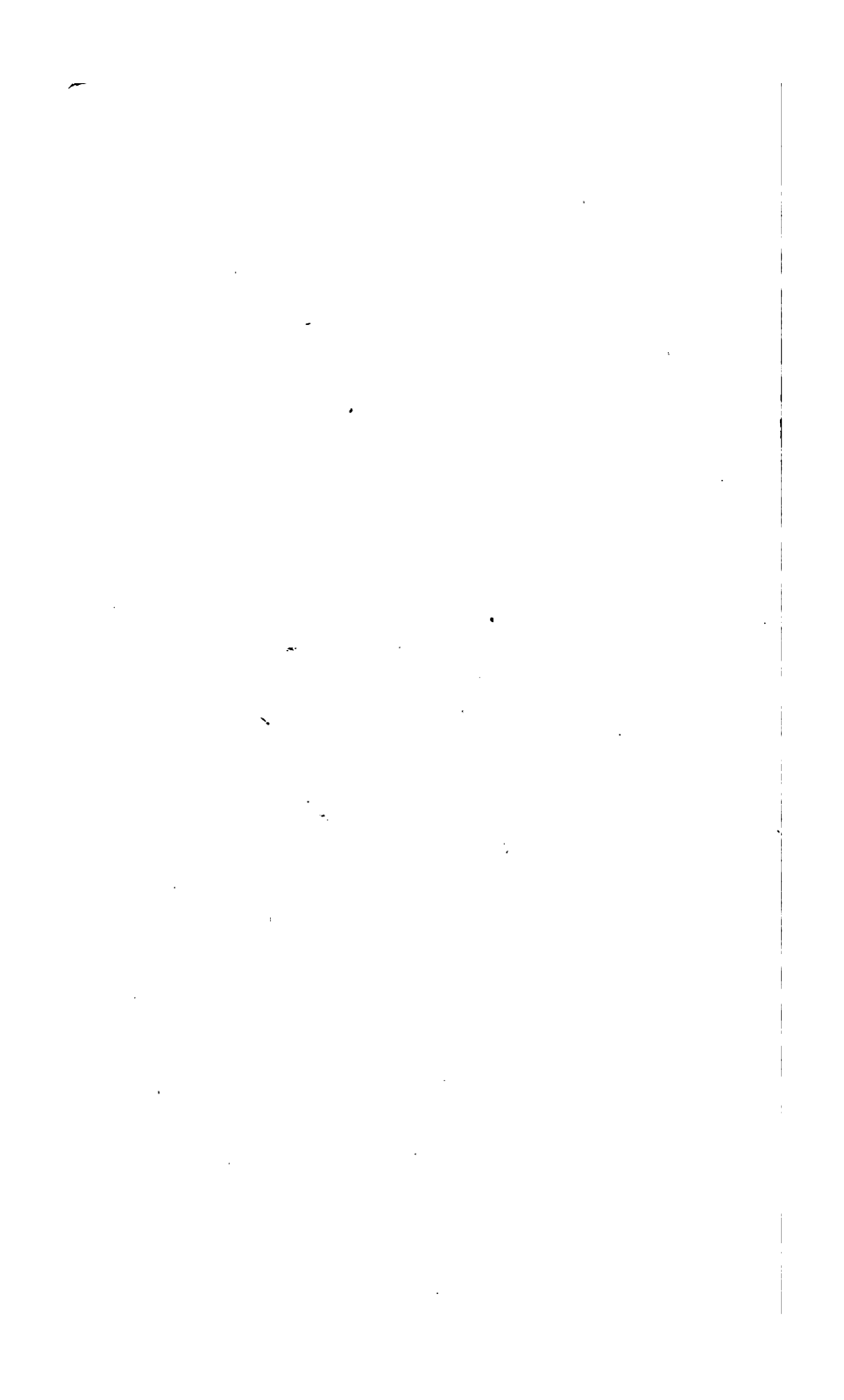
to increase the enjoyment of either party. It was near nine o'clock, but the heat continued to be most oppressive, and the company being for the most part massive in all ways, their union produced more additional caloric than gaiety. The whole process seemed to have the power of turning the hours into molten lead as they passed, a portion of which appeared to drop and weigh heavily on each individual head. In vain Sir Matthew made the circle of the company, pausing in front either of the richest or handsomest ladies, as duty or inclination preponderated; in vain he uttered his newest puns and freshest bon-mots—not one of them had strength to laugh beyond a little feeble “He, he!” and even that was evidently a painful effort.

Things were in this state when Lady Clarissa Shrimpton suddenly arose from the silken couch amidst whose pillows she was imbedded, and, without explaining her intentions to my Lady Dowling or any one else, darted through the open French window and out upon the well-shaven lawn.

Had it been possible that any one in the room could have been ignorant of the rank of Lady Clarissa, he must from that moment have felt an innate conviction that she was



1. M. P. standing from Lady's Dressing Room



somebody ; for nobody that was not somebody could have ventured upon so daring an escapade from such a solemn presence-chamber. The effect it produced was electric. Sir Matthew darted across the room with the eagerness of a man of gallantry and gaiety. He piqued himself upon being, of all the great men in the neighbourhood, the one upon whom Lady Clarissa bestowed the most attention. His estimate of the outward advantages of his extensive person was indeed not a low one ; and, despite all his lady could do to crush such an odious idea, he was conscious of being devoted to the fair sex, and flattered himself that the fair sex was not ungrateful. In fact, his general manner to ladies had a good deal of what in female slang is called *swaining* ; but to Lady Clarissa it was certainly something more. Had she been simply Miss Shrimpton, it is probable that, notwithstanding her great mental advantages, she would never have been exposed to the danger of this fascinating distinction, for she was nearly forty years old, had a sharp nose, and was deplorably thin. But Sir Matthew was not a man to be insensible to the charm of getting talked of in the neighbourhood about his devotion to

Lady Clarissa Anybody, even had she been a skeleton with a Gorgon's head. There was, moreover, independently of her bewitching title, a charm in her conversation and character to which the knight was peculiarly sensible. Her ladyship was celebrated for her devotion both to literature and art; and she permitted all the world to know, for indeed she never ceased to repeat it, that talent of every kind was to her an object of idolatry. Now, Sir Matthew knew that he was full of talent—poetical talent, pictorial talent, epigrammatic talent, every kind of talent,—and it was certainly very delightful to be appreciated by such a superior creature as Lady Clarissa. So strongly indeed did this intellectual sympathy between them occasionally manifest itself, that not even the sharp elbows and red-tipped nose of the noble lady—who, to borrow the phrase of an inimitable describer, was in every sense "*preter-blue-perfect*"—could render Lady Dowling quite easy respecting the nature of the friendship. Nor was it without something like a pang that she marked the sudden alacrity of movement with which Sir Matthew now strode across the floor to accompany Lady Clarissa in the extraordinary frolic which led her, in white satin

shoes and a gauze dress, to exchange the drawing-room for the garden at nine o'clock in the evening.

But upon this occasion, as upon many others, Lady Dowling found consolation in the well-known fact, that Lady Clarissa rarely moved a step without being obsequiously attended by her humble companion, Miss Mogg. This young lady had been selected to fill her present enviable situation principally from her appearance, though she was indeed by no means void of many other qualifications admirably suited to it. But in appearance she was a striking contrast to her tall and slender patroness; and, notwithstanding Lady Clarissa's mental superiority, she was not insensible to the advantage of having a foil that should set off the charms upon which she particularly prided herself. Lady Clarissa had a thin, narrow foot, and an ankle that resembled nothing so much as the leg of a robin-red-breast; the person of Miss Mogg was supported on shafts that told her Saxon origin, and feet that need not have shrunk from sustaining an ox. Lady Clarissa's slender waist might have been encircled by a ring of six inches diameter; a cestus of nearly double the span had often gone nigh to suffocate her plump

companion. The throat of Lady Clarissa had not only all the flexile length of the swan's, but might even be said to resemble that of the stork in its proportions: while the head of Miss Mogg was separated from her shoulders by an interval so trifling as hardly to be perceptible at all. The hair of her ladyship, though not very abundant, was as black as ink, and its straight nature enabled her to lay it in classic bands upon her forehead, furnishing a graceful foundation for the wreath of oak-leaves with which, in judicious imitation of Domenichino's exquisite head of Sappho, she usually adorned herself when in full dress: while Miss Mogg, on the contrary, had a bushy abundance of flaxen curls, which gave a round fussy sort of contour to her face, that could not fail of setting off to advantage the severer outline of the noble lady; and, in a word, the contrast was altogether perfect.

To the great satisfaction of Lady Dowling, this round little personage rose, as usual, when her principal rose, and waddled to the window after her. Many people are apt to overlook and forget companions, and the poor toady is as much used to be trod upon as the despised reptile whose name she bears. But, if the world in general be found guilty of this

scorn towards what is too lowly to turn and scorn again, more especially was our knight liable to the weakness.

As he now hastened to offer his hand to Lady Clarissa in order to assist her in stepping over the window-sill, he very nearly overturned Miss Mogg as he passed her ; but, heeding neither the resistance her plump person offered to his passing elbow, nor yet the timid " Oh ! " which spoke her alarm, he hurried onward, and, manfully seizing the hand whose touch was honour, walked out side by side with the titled lady upon the lawn.

CHAPTER II.

A delightful Ramble—Friendship and the Muse—An Adventure—Danger and Escape—Gratitude and Benevolence.

“ ONLY see that ! How very extraordinary !” exclaimed Lady Dowling, suddenly rising, and addressing herself to no one in particular.

“ Oh, how delightful !” cried several ladies at once. “ How clever Lady Clarissa is ! Such a delicious refreshment !” “ To be sure, it is the only thing in the world to do on such an evening as this,” exclaimed Miss Brotherton ; who, as being the richest young lady in company, very properly thought she ought to speak first. “ I am sure I shall follow her example ;” and, so saying, she rose and walked towards the window. Three of the most dauntless ladies in the party started up to follow her ; which, strange as the manœuvre appeared to the full-dressed Lady Dowling, she did not oppose, greatly preferring that the

garden party should be enlarged. But, though not by her, the adventurous fair ones were stopped, before they accomplished their design, by a chorus of remonstrances from all the rest of the company, male and female.

"My dear Miss Brotherton, you will catch your death!" cried one.

"Oh, look at your satin shoes!" screamed another. "What would Mr. Tomkins say if he was here, Mrs. Tomkins?" demanded a third.

"And your neck and shoulders, Miss Williamson!" whispered a fourth.

"And your blonde dress, Mrs. Simpkins!" vociferated a fifth; with a vast deal more in the same strain. So that, before the *sortie* was accomplished, every lady, save Miss Brotherton, yielded before the storm of reasons that pelted them on all sides. The rich young lady, however, stood firm: what young lady with two hundred thousand pounds would not?

"Mr. Augustus Dowling," said she, still pursuing her way window-ward, but pausing ere she stepped out, "will you have the excessive kindness,—*vraiment j'ai honte*;—but will you have the charity to look in the hall for my pink satin *mantelet*, trimmed with swansdown; without it I fear my poor little

shoulders will be *arrosées*— ‘too rudely, alas!’ with the dews of night.”

Now the young lady’s shoulders were really very pretty little shoulders, and, moreover, Mr. Augustus Dowling, notwithstanding all his elegant *nonchalance*, perfectly well remembered that she had two hundred thousand pounds; so, before she had stamped with her little foot twice, in her impatience to join those who, from their gaiety, seemed to be so greatly enjoying the fresh air, he returned with the *mantelet*, and having, as usual, adjusted his glass in the corner of his eye to prevent his making any mistakes, placed it on her shoulders.

“Now, then,” she cried, “give me your arm. Is not this good fun?”

The young gentleman obeyed, declaring it was delightful, and in a moment they were beside Lady Clarissa and Sir Matthew, good Miss Mogg keeping a step or two behind.

“Nobody but your ladyship had wit enough to find out that there was more air to be got out of doors than in,” said the heiress, venturing to pass her arm through that of her noble friend. But, upon this occasion, Lady Clarissa, though particularly intimate with Miss Brotherton, and seldom refusing to use her car-

riage and act as her chaperone to all the parties in the neighbourhood, seemed inclined to check her advances.

"My dear child," said she, "I am delighted to see you come out. I am sure you must have been half stifled, as well as myself. But you and Mr. Augustus must wander away without me, and you may take Mogg with you, if you like it, for I have just got into a discussion with Sir Matthew that I would not break off for the world. So away with you, my dear, as fast as you can."

Lady Clarissa's will was of course law, even to the heiress, but it was not without a little toss of the head that she turned off to another walk; nor was it without a considerable struggle between her inclination and a sense of propriety, which, all things considered, really did her honour, that she permitted poor Miss Mogg to obey the hint of her patroness, and follow after.

"And so you really have not seen this gifted young man yet, Sir Matthew?" resumed her ladyship, as soon as they were again alone. "You have never yet seen this Osmund Norval?"

"No, my lady, I have not," replied the knight; "and to say the truth," he added,

venturing to press with his stout arm the slender one that rested on it, "to say the truth, though I have heard a monstrous deal about him, I was determined that I would have nothing to say to him till I had heard your opinion, my lady."

"How kind! how flattering, Sir Matthew! But you will let me bring him to you now?"

"Will I?" (again pressing her lean arm.)

"Fancy me saying no, when you tell me to say yes! Ay, my lady? You know better than that, or I am greatly mistaken."

"Oh! Sir Matthew, you are always so kind! What magnificent gardens you have! By the way, I think I never tasted such a pine as that we had to-day. I assure you, my brother, Lord Highlandloch, is celebrated for his pines—quite celebrated. They are the finest in all Scotland, but I give you my honour I never saw one equal to it at his table."

"Oh! my lady, that is only your amiable condescension," replied Sir Matthew, greatly touched by this preference. "But, if you really can be so polite as to think them good, I must entreat you just to let me knock at the head-gardener's door, who lives close outside this gate. I don't let him live inside, because of his children, Lady Clarissa. I know what

birds peck the worst—ha! ha! ha! However, you *must* just let me pass through the gate to tell him to put up a brace for your ladyship. They shall be well taken care of now, my lady, trust me for that: I never valued them so much before, I promise you."

"You are too kind a thousand times!" said the lady, stretching out her own hand to open the gate. "I will go with you: there is nothing I doat upon like visiting a gardener. Could he not take us into the hot-houses, Sir Matthew? You have no idea how I should enjoy it."

By no means displeased to show off the high-born lady upon his arm, even to the eyes of his gardener, the knight joyfully assented to the proposal.

"Macnab," he cried, knocking as he passed the cottage-window, "Macnab! come here directly, and bring a knife and a basket with you: you must come directly—this very moment, and unlock the hot-houses—her ladyship wishes to walk through them; and I must have one or two of the finest pines cut, and packed in a basket, to put into Miss Brother-ton's carriage: but mind, they are for Lady Clarissa Shrimpton; so you had better give them in charge to her ladyship's own man."

Mr. Alexander Macnab promptly left the seeds he was sorting, and prepared himself, basket in hand, to follow his master. The knight and the lady left the cottage, arm-in-arm together; but before they again entered the garden, a fancy seized her lively ladyship that a short ramble in the green lane outside it would be the most agreeable thing in the world.

"Dear me! what a poetical idea!" exclaimed Sir Matthew with enthusiasm. "There's only one thing," he said, stopping short, "but that will spoil my pleasure altogether: I am so dreadfully afraid that your ladyship will take cold."

"Ask the gardener's wife to lend me one of her kerchiefs," said lady Clarissa, laughing. "But it will only be to satisfy you, Sir Matthew, for there is no catching cold in such weather as this."

It was with something quite like tender anxiety that the knight stepped back, asked for and obtained a neat shawl, and himself wrapped it round the slender person of his amiable companion.

"Thank you! thank you a thousand times! But, dear Sir Matthew, I must not lose my pines by my frolic: will you give the gardener

orders to get them without waiting for us? And perhaps you would let him put up a bunch of grapes, and a few peaches at the same time—it is no good to let him wait for us, Sir Matthew;—when you and I get into a chat together, we shall neither of us think of the pines again.”

Quitting her highly-valued aristocratic arm for an instant, the flattered knight ran back and gave the necessary orders; and then, almost unconscious, in his full contentment, that his own gray head was as bare as that of the oak-crowned nymph by his side, he returned to his bewitching companion and led her gently onward over the mossy turf that bordered the road.

The gardener and his wife stood together for a moment looking after them. “Who would think now that she was one of the true old gentlefolks, and Scotch to boot, to see her pair off that way with our rogue of a spinner there? How, in God’s name, can she choose to be so free and friendly with such as he?” said the gardener.

“Just for the same reason as yourself, Sawney,” replied his wife; “to get all she can out of him.”

“ And that’s true,” replied Sawney, setting off upon his business. “ I had like to forgot the pines, and the grapes, and the peaches. She’s not so far wrong after all ; and yet ’tis a pity, too.”

* * * * *

The evening was still oppressively sultry, and hardly a breath of air disturbed either the leaves on the oaks beside the road, or those that mimicked them so abominably on the lady’s brow ; but, nevertheless, there was a freshness in the smell of the hedges and the grass which could not fail to be agreeable to any nerves that had endured the steaming dinner and the irksome drawing-room of Dowling Lodge.

The shady lane in which the knight and the lady were thus recreating themselves, after skirting the extensive and lofty walls of the garden, turned at right angles both to the right and the left at the corner of it. The branch to the left followed the boundary of the garden, and led to the stable-yard and back entrance to the house ; that to the right conducted to the factory, which was the source and head-spring of all the wealth that flowed over, and irrigated with its fructifying stream,

meadows, parks, hot-beds, and flower-gardens, till it made itself a prodigious cistern in the depths and heights of Dowling Lodge.

When the strangely-matched pair came to this point, Sir Matthew made a halt, till Lady Clarissa came to the end of a little poem, which the protégé whom she was so desirous of introducing to her rich and (to use her own words) “really very clever friend” had inscribed in her album.

Nothing could be more agreeable to her ladyship than this pause. In the first place it was the greatest possible relief to her lungs, for the lines she was reciting were much too full of deep feeling to be repeated without a painful effort while walking; and, in the second, the halt, accompanied as it was by a look of earnest attention from her apparently-delighted companion, furnished the most agreeable commentary in the world upon the poem itself, as well as on her manner of reciting it.

It said so plainly “Stay!—move not!—lest a word, an intonation, a cadence, be lost to me!”

Lady Clarissa was really touched by it; and, let Sawney the gardener, and his wife Janet, say or think what they would, neither peaches

nor pines had anything to do with the gratification she at this moment experienced in the society of the great manufacturer.

His eyes were fixed on her face, and she bore the gaze, and returned it with that sort of courage and confidence which genuine enthusiasm alone can give.

She had just finished a stanza when Sir Matthew ceased to move, and, feeling that he did so under the influence of a spell, which she well knew would be more powerful still were it spoken when she were at rest—for Lady Clarissa was aware that she was exceedingly short-breathed—she repeated the last eight lines in a manner that showed she felt the pleasure she was producing—a pleasure, as she thought, like that occasionally caused by the repetition of some delicious phrase in a musical composition, reiterated as if to fill the soul with its sweetness.

“ And should the eye for which I write
By sun-lit morn, or moon-lit night,
Drop on this record of my soul,
Which tells a part—ah! not the whole—
Of hopes that, trembling, faltering, timid,
Now fire my cheek, now turn it livid,—
Should that soft eye but drop one tear,
I'd hug my chain, and call it dear!”

The tear asked for almost came as she ceased.

"You feel it, dear Sir Matthew!" she said, in a voice of considerable emotion.

"I'd hug my chain, and call it dear!"—she again murmured, hanging on his arm with such an evident degree of weakness as showed the slender form to be less powerful than the ardent spirit it enshrined.

"Let us turn back," said Sir Matthew. "My dear friend," faintly ejaculated Lady Clarissa, "you are moved too strongly.—But—no, no! Sir Matthew! Believe me, it were far better for both of us that we should proceed.—Are we, either of us, my dear friend, in a state at this moment to meet the curious stare of idle eyes?—Come on, dear Sir Matthew!"—and she gently pulled him forward as she spoke—"this soft glade invites us."

Though perfectly determined to find some excuse for not leading his fascinating companion within sight of his grim-looking factory, which another turn in the lane at no great distance would have made very unpicturesquely visible, it was impossible at that moment not to yield to the gentle violence which carried him forward; and, in what Lady Clarissa felt to be very eloquent silence, he proceeded for a few steps farther. Considerably, however, before they had reached the dreaded turning,

his good star shot a ray upon him in the shape of a very large cow, with a pair of enormous horns, that slowly turned the corner, and fronted them.

"Good Heaven!" he exclaimed, in an accent of great alarm. "There is that horrid spotted cow! She is the worst beast in the whole parish. Turn back, dearest Lady Clarissa! turn back instantly."

"How kindly considerate!" returned Lady Clarissa. "But you little know the strength of your friend's mind, Sir Matthew. Were I alone, indeed, I might tremble and turn as pale as the veriest child that ever hid its face on a nurse's lap; but with you!"—and here the lady turned a very flattering glance on the athletic form of her protector.

"Heaven knows," replied Sir Matthew, once more pressing her lean arm, "Heaven knows that all which the strength of man could do to protect you would not be left undone by me—but consider the dog!" he added, pointing to a little cur that always followed him; "its power of irritating an animal of this kind is quite extraordinary." And as he spoke he whistled in a note which meant, as his dog Spite knew as well as he did, neither more nor less than—"At her, Spite!"

"If anything can keep Spite quiet," resumed the knight, "it is whistling to him."

Obedient to the true meaning of the signal, however, the dog sprang forward, and of course there ensued the scene which always follows on such occasions. The dog yelped, and affected to spring at the nose of the cow, while she, somewhat accelerating her stately pace, threw up her tail, and bent down her head till her horns nearly touched the ground, offering so exact an image of "the cow with the crumpled horn," with whose portrait her ladyship's early studies had made her familiar, that her confidence in the prowess of Sir Matthew could sustain her no longer, and she rapidly uttered a succession of tremendous screams.

The purpose of the knight was accomplished, and he therefore indulged the fair lady by letting her scream on for at least a minute and a half, while he supported her with every appearance of the most pitying tenderness. Meanwhile, two little boys, who were making their way from the factory homewards, across a field by the side of the lane, ran with terrified curiosity, and all the strength they had, to a gate, through which they could see the interesting spectacle of a fine, full-dressed lady screaming with all her might from be-

tween the sheltering arms of the magnificent Sir Matthew Dowling, and a little dog worrying an old half-starved cow.

"Come here, you young scamps!" cried the knight, on perceiving the two little heads peeping over the gate: "Don't you see what's going on? Clamber over the gate, can't you? and drive back that devil of a beast."

The youngest, but by far the stoutest and tallest of the two boys, instantly obeyed this command, and, placing himself midway between the tormented cow and the fair creature whose nerves her menacing attitude had so cruelly shaken, he stood manfully astride in the middle of the lane, flourished his ragged hat on high, and with a few lusty "Wough! woughs!" repeated at the top of his young voice, succeeded in turning the front of the enemy, which was presently seen to wheel round, and, by a sort of feeble, ambling little trot, speedily got out of sight round the corner.

"Now, then," said Sir Matthew, "let me lead you home, my dear lady!"

"Not till I have thanked my little deliverer," exclaimed Lady Clarissa, with very sentimental fervour. "Good heaven! what might have been my fate without him! I know—I feel, Sir Matthew, that you never could have borne

to leave me, and what then could have stopped the fearful approach of that most vicious animal?—Death, or worse than death—dislocation of limb, disfigurement of feature! Oh, Sir Matthew, your heart, I know, will go side by side with mine. Tell me, what can I do—what can we both do—to reward the astonishing bravery of that noble little fellow?”

“Depend upon it, my lady, he will be delighted if you will give him sixpence.”

“Sixpence?” cried her ladyship, turning extremely red,—but in a moment she recovered herself, and said: “Oh! Sir Matthew! do I not know how dearly you love a jest? Men of wit and humour can rarely be grave for long together, even under circumstances that most keenly touch their feelings; did I not know you well, my friend, what should I not think of your proposal? But come, come—be serious for a moment longer: we have, it is true, escaped a tremendous danger, and it may well make us feel light at heart; but we will not laugh over it, till we have settled in what way that heroic child shall receive the meed he has earned. I shall not rest in peace, my friend, unless his destiny be as favourably influenced by me, as mine has probably been by him. Sir Matthew, you have great power, enormous

wealth, a generous heart, a noble nature, and intellect, before which, if I mistake not, all difficulties will melt away like a mist before the sun. Of all this I am quite certain. There is but one IF in the business. If you value me, Sir Matthew, as much as I think you do, that little boy now getting over the gate will be clothed, educated, fed, lodged by you. Do I deceive myself? or will the daily sight of him, by renewing the memory of this evening, rather cause you pleasure than pain?"

Sir Matthew Dowling clearly saw that sending "the little blackguard to the devil," which was decidedly what his heart whispered to him, would, at this stage of the business, be inevitably sending her sentimental ladyship to at least an equal distance from himself; and this he had no inclination to do. She was the only Lady Somebody Something in the whole neighbourhood, and he was quite aware that he had already acquired more envy and hatred among his friends and neighbours, by the superior degree of intimacy he had contrived to achieve with her, than by all his successful struggles to outspend them all.

This pleasure was not to be given up for a trifle, especially at a moment when it seemed so very clear that it only depended on himself

to make all the world perceive that they were dearer friends than ever ; so, making a virtue of necessity, he looked in her face with one of his wittiest smiles, and, cleverly taking the cue she had given, replied—" If you had *not* found out that I was jesting with you, Lady Clarissa, I never should have believed in your friendship more ! Come here, my boy," he continued, raising his loud voice to a note that must have been heard as far as the factory, " Come here, I say."

The little fellow, on hearing these imperative accents, which were not quite unknown to him, though this was the first time he had been so greatly honoured as to have them addressed to himself, again let go the hand of his brother, by whose side he had begun to resume his progress homeward, and, once more clambering over the gate, presented himself, cap in hand, before the illustrious pair.

" You are a happy little boy," said Lady Clarissa, " in having had the extraordinary good fortune of looking over yonder gate at the moment you did ; and you are a brave little fellow into the bargain for not running away, as you certainly might have done, when you saw that dreadful beast. Oh ! those tremendous horns, Sir Matthew ! they haunt me

still ! I am quite sure it will be weeks before I lay my head on my pillow without dreaming of them. But you drove them away, my dear child, and, as a reward for it, you shall be comfortably clothed and fed for the rest of your life. You will like that, won't you?"

" I should very much like never to go to work at the factory any more," replied the child: " but, please, ma'am," he added the minute after, " I'd sooner you'd clothe and feed Teddy than me. He looked over the gate first, please, ma'am."

" Did he, my dear ? Then that is another reason why this good gentleman's favour should be shown to you : for if your brother saw my distress first, it was you who were the first to relieve it."

" That was only because Teddy is so lame, please, ma'am," said the boy.

" Lame, is he ?" repeated her ladyship. " Poor fellow ! However, my little man, if I do not greatly mistake, you have this day made a friend, by serving me, who will put you in a situation where, if you behave well, you will be able to assist all who belong to you."

The child opened a pair of remarkably large eyes, and fixing them on her face said, " What ! mother and all ?"

"Yes, I should think so, my dear. He is a fine intelligent-looking little fellow, is he not, Sir Matthew? But he does not look healthy. However, I dare say he will improve in that respect. Plenty of food generally cures all poor people's complaints, particularly when they are young. How old are you, my dear?"

"Nine last birthday," replied the boy.

"A tall little fellow for his age, though very thin, to be sure. And what is your name?"

"Michael Armstrong, ma'am."

"Michael Armstrong: I shall not forget it, I assure you; for truly do I believe that I should have been trampled in the dust by this time, if you had not been heart-strong as well as Armstrong. And what shall we do with him at first, Sir Matthew? Shall we take him home with us?"

"What! to your cottage, my dear lady?—Yes, certainly, if it will give you pleasure."

"My dearest Sir Matthew! there you are at your jestings again."

"Ha! ha! ha! Lady Clarissa, you begin to know me so well that I shall never be able to cut my little dry jokes upon you," replied the knight laughing, as it seemed, most heartily, but inwardly cursing the audacious exaction of his fair friend, in attempting to make him

pay the enormous price she hinted at, for permitting him to enjoy the honour and glory of flirting with her. The idea of being thus entrapped, and forced to adopt "a bag of rags out of his own factory" (for it was thus he inwardly designated little Michael), galled him for a moment so severely, that he was within an ace of exclaiming, "Confound you, and the beggar's brat together, you old fool!" But, most fortunately for all parties, he did no such thing; on the contrary, he happily remembered, at that critical moment, the important hints he had received from his excellent friend Dr. Crockley, and instantly decided that this absurd whim of her ladyship's should be worked up into "the d—d good-natured thing that was to set all right."

At the very same moment, as if to confirm his resolution, Lady Clarissa drew from her pocket a cambric pocket-handkerchief, something the worse for wear, perhaps, but most elaborately embroidered at each corner with the coronet of a countess. It was one of a dozen bequeathed to her a few years before by her thrifty and truly admirable mother, the late Countess of Highlandloch. This coincidence appeared to be the work of Providence.

"Give me your arm, my charming friend!"

said the well-satisfied knight, with an air of tender gallantry; "and only remember, that all I shall do in this business will proceed wholly from my devoted friendship to you. Follow us, little boy, and you shall learn what it is to have served Sir Matthew Dowling's most honoured friend."

Having said this, he began leading his fair companion back towards the house as rapidly as might be consistent with the delicate style in which she was shod.

"Please, ma'am, may I go and tell Teddy?" said little Michael, walking after them.

"Teddy?—who is Teddy, my little man?" inquired Lady Clarissa, graciously smiling upon him; for her ladyship, whatever her ordinary mood, was at this moment in the best of all possible humours with herself and every body else. There had been various passages in what had passed between herself and Sir Matthew, during this most delightful walk, which convinced her that the knight, notwithstanding the homage he paid to her rank, could not wholly resist the fascinations of her person, talents, and manners; and the conviction pleased her. But let not the character of this noble lady be for a moment misunderstood. Lucretia herself would hardly have

shrunk with greater horror from an improper attachment. All she dreamed of in her intimacy with Sir Matthew Dowling, with the young poet Osmund Norval, and with a few other gentlemen whom she was in the habit of meeting, was but that their admiring friendship should be animated by a lambent, innoxious flickering of the flame, which, after a peculiar theory of her own, she believed to pervade the universe, cheering the well-conducted by its mild platonic warmth, but scorching, burning, and destroying those who permitted it to exercise over them a too-sovereign sway and masterdom. That she had reached the age of forty, unsolicited in marriage by any suitor of any degree, she attributed, rightly enough perhaps, to the unfortunate disproportion between her fortune and her rank ; but must she, therefore, live and die without the sweet consciousness of having been loved ? Where was the law that enforced such cruelty ? She knew it not ; and accordingly had, for many years, and quite upon principle, made up her mind to permit as many gentlemen, of all ages, ranks, and conditions, to deserve "the soft impeachment," whether they owned it or not, as it was in her power to captivate. For most of these tender, and really very innocent, friendships she was

able to assign to herself some excellent cause—as poetical sympathy with one, botanical sympathy with another, philosophical religious sympathy with a third, and so on; but in the case of Sir Matthew Dowling she sometimes felt a little puzzled herself.

Not, however, that she was weak enough in the least degree to blame herself for wishing to be admired by a vulgar man. She had long ago given such feelings to the winds. From the time she quitted, on the death of her mother, the floods and the fells of her native land, to inhabit a pretty little cottage (the timely gift of an English godmother) which happened to be situated in the midst of a manufacturing district, she had been schooling her spirit to endure the change from poor lairds of a hundred descents, to rich manufacturers, who would have been, for the most part, quite as well pleased had they been unable to trace one. Just at first, her Scotch pride rebelled a little; but a week or two of quiet meditation on the subject led her to perceive so clearly all she might lose, and all she might gain, by being or not being on friendly terms with her neighbours, that she made up her mind on the matter at once, and thenceforward feasted upon delicate cates, and battered in the fruc-

tifying sunshine of universal popularity, in a neighbourhood that might be safely described as the richest in the world.

But still this did not quite explain the terms she was upon with Sir Matthew Dowling, and she did feel sometimes conscious of taking more pains to please him than she quite knew why, for she was unconscious that it arose from a latent wish to be distinguished by a man celebrated for the warmth of his devotion to the fair sex. But for this, she must not be out of measure blamed, inasmuch as those who have reached the age for looking on upon the drama of life can many of them testify that in this she only yielded to a weakness very unaccountably common to the majority of the sex.

But poor little Michael Armstrong has been left unmercifully long, looking up in her ladyship's smiling face, as she inquired who Teddy was.

"Teddy is my brother, please, ma'am," was his answer.

"Is he still waiting for you at the gate, my dear?" said the lady. "I don't see him."

"He can't stand very well, ma'am, because he is lame," replied Michael. "I shouldn't wonder if he was laid down, and gone to sleep."

"Gone to sleep!—why, it is hardly bedtime

yet, my dear, is it? However, I suppose he had better go and see, Sir Matthew?—Your brother,” turning again to the child, “is younger than you are, I suppose, if he falls asleep on the grass like a baby? Is he old enough to go home by himself, and tell the great news that has happened to you?”

“Teddy is two years older than me—only he is always so tired,” replied the boy.

“Well, then, just step back, and bid him run along home by himself, and tell all the family what a fine act you have done, and that Sir Matthew Dowling is going to take care of you all the rest of your life.”

Michael now, for the first time, ventured to look steadily up into the face of the majestic Sir Matthew, and his little heart sank within him. It was quite evident, from the child's speaking countenance, that no pleasurable ideas were suggested by the assurance that Sir Matthew would take care of him all the rest of his life. The knight saw this, and would for a moment have desired no better sport than wringing his neck round: nevertheless, he patted his head with astonishing condescension, and said, “It is quite true, my boy. For the sake of this charming lady, for whose happiness you must pray morning, noon, and night,

I will undertake to provide for you. You may step back, if you will, and tell your brother so, who, if he be two years older than you, will be able to make your friends understand the good fortune that has happened to you."

"I have got no friends, please, sir," said the boy.

"Where do you live then?"

"With mother, sir."

"Is not she your friend, my poor child?" demanded Lady Clarissa in an accent of great feeling.

"Please, ma'am, she is my mother," answered Michael, while a slight flush mantled his pale cheek, and something like a tear twinkled in his eye.

"How very odd!" exclaimed Lady Clarissa.

"Is she not kind to you, my boy?"

"Kind?" responded Michael, staring at her.

"Do you love her, my little fellow?"

"Love her?" again echoed Michael.

"Whatever she is, she has not taught you good manners, my lad, or you would not answer her ladyship this way," said the knight rather indignantly.

The little boy was certainly very foolish, for, large as his eyes were, they could not contain

the salt rheum which, for no reason in the world that the lady or gentleman could guess, first filled them and then ran down in two great big drops upon his cheeks.

"I dare say he is hungry," exclaimed Lady Clarissa with sudden animation. "How delightful, dearest Sir Matthew, to have found a little creature so greatly in want! Are you hungry, my dear? Tell the truth—don't be afraid."

"Not very," said the child,

"Poor little fellow!—It is quite evident, Sir Matthew, that he is exceedingly shy. Let us go back, shall we?—just as far as the gate, and give the message ourselves to that lazy fellow that he says is asleep under the hedge—and two years older than this one—Only conceive!—I am delighted that *he* is not to be the object of your bounty, for there is nothing so detestable as idleness."

Sir Matthew had turned in compliance with the word and action, which expressed her ladyship's desire that he should do so, and in another minute they reached the gate.

"Where is this brother of yours?—I don't see him," said Lady Clarissa, looking about.

"There he is, ma'am, if you please," replied Michael, once more climbing over the gate;

and presently he was close under the flowery hedge, extending his two hands to raise a miserably sick-looking child, who was, in truth, soundly sleeping there. In consequence of a few words whispered to him by little Michael, the boy came forward with a shuffling gait, his knees sloping inwards, and his legs frightfully emaciated; but the moment he reached the gate, Lady Clarissa exclaimed, " Good gracious ! how beautiful ! "

It was indeed a lovely face that was then turned up to meet her eye ; and when, as if somewhat daunted by her earnest gaze, he removed his own from her countenance to that of Sir Matthew, the bright flash that lighted it up for a moment made it appear more beautiful still.

" And what is your name, my pretty boy ? " said the lady.

" Edward Armstrong, " was the reply.

" But, my dear child, you don't look well, and you ought not to go to sleep so, quite late in the evening, upon the grass. What makes you so very sleepy, my dear ? Have you been at play ? " *W*

" No, ma'am, " replied the boy, furtively glancing at Sir Matthew, " I have been at work. "

"At work! You can't have done much work, my poor little fellow, looking as you do."

"I have been at work since——"

"My dear Lady Clarissa, I really will not let you stay another moment," suddenly exclaimed Sir Matthew. "The heat is gone off, and I am sure you will be quite chilled if you remain any longer out of doors."

"I believe you are right, my dear friend," said Lady Clarissa, with a glance of affectionate gratitude for this earnest zeal. "Let us go. Never can I forget the kindness you have shown me during this eventful walk, and heartless, indeed, must I be were I to refuse to acknowledge that it has made a deep impression on me."

For a moment Lady Clarissa held her coroneted handkerchief to her eyes, and then resumed. "Go home, little Edward; tell your mother, who, by the by, I trust is not harsh to you, that your brother Michael is rewarded for an act of bravery that probably saved the life of an earl's daughter—has been most generously and nobly adopted by her friend Sir Matthew Dowling, and that henceforward she need have no anxiety whatever on his account. Now, then, Sir Matthew, I am ready."

"Are we never to see Michael again?" said

the lame boy, while a sudden expression of anguish passed across his beautiful features.

"Why not, child?" replied her ladyship rather sharply. "Do you suppose that Sir Matthew and I are going to hide him?"

"It is all very well then," returned Edward, limping away. "But be sure to go and tell mother all about it yourself to-morrow, Mike."

"Come along, little one!" said Lady Clarissa, moving off. "Follow behind this generous gentleman, and see the palace of a home which your bravery has won."

So saying, she moved on, the obsequious knight at her side, and the wondering Michael Armstrong after her.

On reaching the gate beside the gardener's house, Sir Matthew paused. He had been meditating, while seemingly listening in rapt attention to the lady's talk, on the effect which would be produced on the party they were about to rejoin, by the appearance of the ragged little companion they had brought back with them.

Had he been a ragged sailor-boy, or a ragged plough-boy, or even a ragged chimney-sweeper, there might by possibility have been excited some feeling of curiosity and interest; but a ragged factory-boy was, of all created

beings, the one least likely to give birth to such emotions among his friends and neighbours, or indeed to any other emotion fit to be exhibited in good society. So, merely saying to his fair friend, "Excuse me, my lady, for one moment," he once more knocked at the cottage-window, and called aloud for "Macnab!"

The obedient North Briton appeared immediately, and was about to forestall the inquiry he anticipated by assurances that her ladyship's pines, peaches, and grapes had all been consigned to the care of her ladyship's own serving-man, when he was very literally struck dumb by his master saying—

"Macnab, take this little boy into the servants' hall, and tell the servants to take care of him—do you hear?—and he is to have a bed made up for him, and—and supper, and breakfast—and all that; and to-morrow I will talk to Parsons about what must be done for him. Observe, Macnab, and take care, if you please, that all the servants about the place know it that this boy is to be the object of the greatest benevolence."

"The greatest—what was you pleased to say, sir?" said the Scotch gardener, really and truly doubting his own ears.

"BENEVOLENCE, sir!" shouted the knight vehemently; "and woe to any one on my estate who dares to question or thwart my design!"

"How inspiring is this angelic goodness," exclaimed Lady Clarissa, affectionately. "Ah, Sir Matthew! how few there are who know you as I know you!"

"Come along, my man," said the Scotchman, leading away Michael; and he said no more till he was quite sure that the knight and the lady had got far enough in their progress across the garden to be out of hearing, and then he added: "And now, my little fellow, tell me, in God's name, what all this means? Why, you look for all the world like one of the little raggamuffins out of the factory."

"I *am* one of the raggamuffins out of the factory," replied Michael.

"You are? and our master's going to make a house-pet of ye? Why, now, you'll be made the talk of the whole country. I should not have been one-half so much surprised if he had taken one of our sucking pigs into the drawing-room."

"Nor I, sir," said Michael, timidly, but with half a smile.

"So, then, you don't understand it much better than I do, it seems? But what did he *say* it was for? He didn't take the Earl of Highlandloch's daughter among the infernal whirligigs, did he, and pick you out as a specimen to be kept in a glass case?"

"I hope he won't put me in a glass case, sir," said Michael, taking courage from the gardener's good-humour; "but why he brought me here at all I don't very well understand. The lady said it was because I held up my hat, and cried 'Wough!' to Dame Knight's old cow: but of course she was only making fun."

"At any rate, he was making no fun, for he roared like a bull-dog, didn't he? So his bidding I'll do, let it mean what it will; and if it brings you food and lodging, I don't suppose you'll break your heart for being taken out of the factory—shall you?"

"Not if he'll take Edward out too," said the boy.

"Edward out too! Oh! Lord, how many more? Did he cry 'Wough!' to the cow, too?"

"I wish he had!" said Michael, shaking his head very mysteriously.

* * * *

Meanwhile Lady Clarissa and the gallant knight re-entered my Lady Dowling's drawing-room, amidst a perfect storm of questions, exclamations of admiration, wonder, fears for the lady's safety, and so forth.

Miss Brotherton, who always took more liberties than any one else, laughed immoderately; Lady Dowling looked the picture of conjugal woe; and good Miss Mogg bustled forward with her usual amiable attention, put a footstool under the lady's misused white satin shoes, took Mrs. Janet Macnab's shawl off her shoulders, and whispered in her ear that she was dreadfully afraid she must have caught cold.

But Lady Clarissa, with a lively action of both hands at once, not only drove Miss Mogg back, but every one else who attempted to crowd round her, saying, "Give me space! give me space, I entreat you! I must have 'ample room and verge enough' to breathe. Such a series of adventures! Lady Dowling, you have no idea! Good heaven! I can hardly believe it myself. I have been in the greatest possible danger of losing my life—a beast—a monster—the most terrific animal certainly that nature ever permitted on the earth! You know, Mogg, I fear nothing—I

have the spirit of my race within me. Who ever heard of a Highlandloch being afraid? But I give you my honour—I pledge my noble word to you all, that such a monster as that which I have escaped from this night might have made the black Douglas fear!”

“Or the Earl of Warwick either, perhaps,” said Miss Brotherton, for she had heard Sir Matthew utter the word “cow,” in answer to the importunate inquiries of his eldest son.

“But what shall I say of Sir Matthew Dowling?” resumed Lady Clarissa, with increased energy. “Such benevolence! such noble, disinterested conduct!—No, I cannot—I really have no strength left. Miss Brotherton, my dear, pray do order your carriage; my nerves are in disorder, so is my dress—in short, I long to get home, and meditate in solitude on my providential escape.”

Here Lady Clarissa found it necessary to lie down upon a sofa, her faithful Mogg endeavouring in vain to pull her dress over her slender feet and ancles, for her ladyship was restless, feverish, and unable to remain in the same attitude for a minute together.

Ere long, however, the carriage of the heiress was announced, and the languid Lady Clarissa exerted herself to reach it, with the

aid of Miss Mogg's substantial arm on one side, and that of Sir Matthew Dowling on the other.

"Farewell, my friend!" she uttered with some effort, after taking her seat: "ere long I shall call upon you, and shall hope to see our interesting protégé looking very differently from what he did when we parted from him. Farewell! I do assure you I am almost fainting! Do ask—will you, dear Sir Matthew?—if the fruit, the pines particularly, are put in. I really think they will do me good, and I am sure I want it. Thank you! thank you! Adieu!

CHAPTER III.

Introduction of Michael Armstrong into the family of Sir Matthew Dowling—Conjectures concerning his Parentage—A Confabulation between Sir Matthew and Mr. Joseph Parsons.

WHEN Mr. Macnab and his little companion entered the kitchen, in their way to the servants' hall, to which place of honour the wondering Scotchman remembered he had been commanded to conduct his charge, the first person they encountered was Mr. Simkins, the butler, whom some accidental wish or want had led to enter a region but rarely honoured by the sunshine of his presence.

"Good evening, Macnab. What, empty-handed? I am afraid you have forgotten the little basket of peaches I desired to have; and upon my word, sir, if you leave it much longer I shall not consider them worth presenting to the lady for whom I desired to have them. Be pleased to recollect, good Mr. Sawney, that when every garden-wall is hung with ripe fruit

a bottle of comfort will be rather too high a price for a dozen."

"Your discourse, Mr. Simkins, is neither civil nor discreet in any way," replied the offended North Briton: "my word, sir, is as good as the Bank, either in England or Scotland; and it is beneath a gentleman, to say nothing of your rank as a butler, Mr. Simkins, to suspect that I should forget it."

"Well, well, the sooner the better, that's all. But who, in God's name, have you got here?"

"That is more than I am able to tell you, sir," replied Macnab. "All I know about him is a mystery. Sir Matthew, and a lady that was hardly born to be so free in his company, came to the garden-house about an hour ago, and Sir Matthew was as gay as a lark, and ambled and smirked; while the Highlandloch's daughter, old fool! looked as well pleased as if she had been gallanted by the Duke of Argyle. Well, sir, he ordered a basket of the choicest and best for her ladyship, and it went against me, Mr. Simkins, both ways—for first it ought to choke her, seeing who she is, and who he is, and next I thought upon my promise to you, sir. However, and nevertheless, Mr. Simkins, I will

keep my word with you, if it cost me a ton of coals more in the forcing."

"But what's all this to do with your ragged companion there? The child looks as if he was ready to drop. I'll bet a bottle you caught him thieving in the fruit-garden."

The boy's colour rose on hearing these words. He spoke not, however; but his large eyes were turned up to the face of his companion, and the fingers of his little hand pressed the hard palm that held them, almost convulsively. Sawney understood the appeal, and answered it: for though, like many other gentlemen, his code of honour was at some points a little loosened and enlarged, to fit and suit his individual circumstances, he felt the value of character as much as any man; and promptly replied, in good Scotch, which must, however, for sundry weighty reasons, be here translated into English: "No, no, Mr. Butler! no such thing, I assure you; the lad's as honest as I am, for aught that I know to the contrary. But, to make a short story of a long one, my lady walked off up the lane, after borrowing a shawl from my wife, and your master with her, Mr. Simkins, who but he?—Well, I had picked the fruit, packed it, and delivered it over to my

lady's man, and was just set down again to my seed-picking, when I heard Sir Matthew's big voice again hallooing to me, and when I came out there stood the ill-sorted pair, arm in arm together, as before, and this ragged chap beside them ! ”

“ Well ! and what then ? ” ejaculated the portly butler, impatiently. “ What a long-winded man you are, Macnab ! ”

“ Hoot, man ! ” retorted Macnab, “ if you want the story, you must just find patience to hear it. ‘ Take this boy to the servants’ hall,’ said Sir Matthew, quite upon the strut, ‘ and order supper and a bed for him.’ ”

“ To the servants’ hall ? ” repeated the indignant man of bottles, measuring the little fellow from head to foot with an eye, which, notwithstanding it was small and bloodshot, was eloquent of scorn. “ To the servants’ hall ? Sir Matthew will inflict his own company upon us next, I suppose. Why, look at the cotton stuff mixed with his hair ! He is neither more nor less than a factory-boy.”

“ To be sure he is,” replied the gardener, shrugging his shoulders ; “ but it’s no fault of mine, Mr. Simkins ; to the servants’ hall I must take him, right or wrong. Come along, boy.”

"Stop one moment, if you please, Macnab. Let me step to Mrs. Thompson's room, and speak one word to her about it. Sit down, sit down, will you, for one moment." And away hurried Mr. Simkins, scattering dismay as he traversed the passages, by uttering as he passed along to footmen and housemaids, abigail and page, "Go to the kitchen, do, in God's name! go and see the company Sir Matthew has been ordering into the servants' hall!"

And away they flew, one after another, eager to see the wonder; so that by the time Mr. Simkins himself returned to the kitchen, marshalling the housekeeper before him, at least half-a-dozen servants had assembled there, all of whom were gazing at little Michael, very much as if he had been caught in a forest, and conveyed thither to gratify their desire of studying natural history.

"Who is that dirty little boy, Macnab?" said the magnificent Mrs. Thompson, advancing to the spot where the gardener was seated with his frightened charge standing beside him, and all the lookers-on making way for her as she passed.

"It is a factory-boy sent here by Sir Matthew, Mrs. Thompson," replied Macnab, while,

forestalling, it may be, the storm likely to follow the intelligence, he seemed to settle himself in the arm-chair either to enjoy the fun, or abide the tempest.

But he was, as it should seem, mistaken as to Mrs. Thompson's feelings; for that lady, though usually considered by the subordinates as somewhat warm in temper, appeared on this occasion to be as mild as a lamb.

"A factory-boy, certainly," she replied with the dignity that was peculiar to her, "nobody is likely to doubt *that*, Mr. Macnab; one might know his calling at half a mile's distance. The vulgar factory itself, with its millions of windows, is not more easily known than the things that crawl out of it with their millions of cotton specks. That is not the main point of the question, Mr. Macnab: it is not what the boy is, but who he is, and for what reason any one has dared to say that he was to sup in the servants' hall."

"Oh! dear me, ma'am," replied the gardener, endeavouring to look very grave, "that wasn't one-half of it. To you, ma'am, it's my duty to repeat Sir Matthew's words exact, and this is what he said. 'Macnab,' or 'Mr. Macnab,' for he calls me both at times, 'take this little boy,' says he, 'into the servants'

hall, and tell every body there to take care of him—every body to take care of him’—that was it, Mrs. Thompson, word for word. And then he went on: ‘He is to have a bed,’ says he, ‘made up on purpose for him, and he is to be waited upon with supper and breakfast,’ and a great deal more, that Mr. Parsons is to make known to-morrow. But you have not heard all yet, ma’am,” continued Macnab, raising his voice, on perceiving that the stately housekeeper was putting herself in act to speak. “Sir Matthew went on, raising his arm like one of his own steam-engines, ‘Observe, Mr. Macnab,’ says he, ‘and take care that all the servants, little and great, know it, that *this boy is to be the object of the greatest benevolence.*’ That’s something new for you, Mrs. Thompson, isn’t it?”

“Sir Matthew may settle about his benevolence with himself, when he is in his own pew at church,” replied Mrs. Thompson, with a very satirical sort of smile; “but most certainly it shall not be brought to dirty my premises; so let me hear no more about it, gardener, if you please.” And with these words she turned haughtily away.

“But, ma’am—Mrs. Thompson—you had better stop, if you please; for go I must, if

that's your answer, and tell Sir Matthew of it."

If Mr. Macnab had been a blacksmith instead of a gardener, he might have been less surprised at the phenomena which followed these words; for he would have known that white heat is stronger than red heat, though it does not look so fierce. He had fancied the housekeeper particularly calm and placable upon this occasion, because, forsooth, she looked rather pale than red when she entered the kitchen; but no sooner had he uttered this threat of reporting her words to Sir Matthew, than the fact of her being in an exceedingly terrible rage became evident. Notwithstanding the usual dignified gentility of her manner, on which, indeed, when more self-possessed, she greatly prided herself, she clenched her fists, raised her arms on high, and, from one of the most imposing housekeepers in the British dominions, suddenly assumed the aspect of an inspired fury.

"Tell! — You? — Sir Matthew? — Blackguard! scoundrel! — base-born spinning spider! — I, that have lived with the Duke of Clarington!"

"'Tis too, too bad, and that's the fact!" exclaimed my Lady Dowling's own footman,

who always sided with the principal person in company, which gave him very much the air of being a superior person himself; "and if I was Mrs. Thompson, I'd throw my salary in the vulgar fellow's face, before I'd bear to have a factory-boy pushed into my company."

"And so I will, Mr. Jennings, you may depend upon it," replied the incensed prime mistress, somewhat softened: "so now, Mr. Macnab, you may just take yourself off, and leave the brat in the kitchen, or take him away with you, as you like best."

"I have done my share of the *benevolent* job, so I will wish you good night, Mrs. Thompson; and whether this little fellow eats his supper and breakfast in the kitchen or the hall, it will be much the same to him, I fancy." So saying, the gardener rose, and giving a sort of general nod to the company, left the kitchen.

Considering that there had been nothing very affectionate in the nature of the intercourse which had taken place between them, it was rather singular that the little Michael should feel as sorry as he did at the departure of Mr. Macnab. But he did feel sorry, and when the door shut after him, he turned away, and hid his face with his uplifted arm.

Pride of place and elevation of character having been in a considerable degree satisfied by Mrs. Thompson's energetic expression of her feelings, something like curiosity awoke within her to learn what the circumstances had been which had induced Sir Matthew Dowling to declare an intention of acting benevolently. For a moment she struggled against it, and again seemed about to leave the room; but as she turned her eyes upon the child, she seemed to feel that before one so very abject no loss of importance could be feared, even if she did question him. So, with the air of a judge walking up to the bench, she stalked onwards to the seat Mr. Macnab had left, and placing her austere person in it, made a signal with her hand, that the kitchen-maid who had ventured to approach the little boy should stand back, and leave her space to examine him.

On one side of this space stood the lordly butler, with his arms folded, and a look of scorn upon his countenance that seemed to question the propriety of the measure Mrs. Thompson had thought proper to adopt. On the other was the courtly Jennings, with an arm resting upon her chair, as if to give evidence that he was near at hand to support her.

An extremely fat and very professional-looking cook came next ; while my lady's own maid, with all the elegant superiority of attire which marks the station, held a scent-bottle to her nose, that the curiosity which led her to be a witness of this extraordinary scene might be punished with as little suffering as possible. Two sprightly housemaids seemed to find something vastly amusing in the whole business, though their evident merriment was restrained by the solemnity of Mrs. Thompson's manner.

" Look up in my face, little boy," said the housekeeper, as soon as she had seated herself and saw that those around her stood still, as if they had taken their places, and were prepared to listen.

Michael did not move: he was probably ashamed to show that he was weeping, before the face of a lady who spoke so very grandly.

The kitchen-maid gave him a nudge, but a gentle one, whispering at the same time—" Look up, my boy. What be you 'feard of? There's nobody as wants to hurt you here."

Thus encouraged, Michael let his arm drop by his side, and discovered a face that was indeed sallow, and by no means very plump, but with features and expression which, what-

ever Sir Matthew Dowling's men and maids might think of it, might have sufficed to make the fortune of an able painter.

"Whose child are you?" demanded the housekeeper.

"Mother's," replied the boy.

"I suspected as much," rejoined the inquisitor, half aside to Mr. Jennings.

"And I beant no ways surprised to hear it, I promise you," he replied.

Mrs. Thompson sighed deeply. "It is dreadful!" said she. Then after taking a moment to recover herself, she resumed, "And where does the unhappy person live?"

"Please, ma'am, who?" said the puzzled boy.

"The—your mother, child. Shame upon you for forcing me to name her!"

Michael gave a little shake of the head, which seemed to the merciful kitchen-maid to say, that he did not know what the great lady meant; but he presently replied, as if discreetly determined to mind only what he did understand, "Mother lives in Hoxley-lane, ma'am."

"The most deplorable situation in the whole parish! inhabited only by the *very* lowest!" observed the housekeeper, with another indignant sigh.

"So much the worse for she," muttered the kitchen-maid; but not loud enough to be heard by her in whose hands rested the appointment of kitchen-maids as well as cooks.

"And why does such as you come here?" resumed the housekeeper.

"Because the squire ordered t'other man to bring me," answered Michael.

"I suspect that the boy is a natural fool," observed Mrs. Thompson, addressing the butler. "It is a sure fact, and a great dispensation—bad parents have almost always children out of shape, both mind and body. You may take my word for that, all of you," she added, looking round her; "and you will do well to teach it to your children after you."

"I'll be burnt if I don't think it very likely that it was his own father sent him here, and no one else," said Mr. Jennings, chuckling.

"Fie! Jennings, fie!" returned Mrs. Thompson, with a frown. "God in heaven only knows what may have been the cause of it?—Not but what it does look strange—there's no denying that."

"Do you know anything about your father, child?" said Mr. Simkins, in a magisterial tone.

"Father's in heaven," replied the child.

"Mercy on me! do you hear him? Is not that like mocking the Lord's prayer?" exclaimed the lady's-maid.

"No, it is not!" said Michael, while a flash of youthful indignation rushed into his face. "My father is in heaven along with God."

"I dare say he means that his father is dead," observed the butler with an air of great sagacity; "and if what has been jealoused at is correct," he added, winking his eye at Mr. Jennings, "it is very natural that he should have been told to say so."

"That's very true," said the housekeeper, "and it may be, certainly, that the child knows nothing about it whatever, either one way or t'other—indeed, I think it's a good deal the most likely that he does not;—but, any how, it's a very shocking business, and, as far as I am concerned, I'll neither make nor meddle in the matter. Of course, the men-servants may do just as they like about taking notice of him—for here he is, and here he will bide, I dare say; but I recommend the maids to follow my example, and not to injure their characters, nor to corrupt their morals by having anything to do with the offspring of—It is more decent not to finish what I was going to say for your goods, young women,—and lucky it is

that there is no need. You must all understand me without it."

Mrs. Thompson then rose from her chair, and, turning her eyes, and indeed her head, aside, to prevent herself from again seeing Michael, she walked, with a degree of stateliness and majesty that few housekeepers ever attained, through the kitchen, along the passage, across the servants' hall, into the sacred shelter of her own parlour, where she gave way to emotions which rendered a glass of prime London Madeira absolutely necessary.

Meanwhile Michael remained in no very happy condition in the kitchen. He was very tired, very sleepy, very thirsty, very much longing to see his mother and brother, and very greatly puzzled as to himself.

But, though accounted to be a brave little fellow for his age, he could not muster courage enough to ask any questions of those around him, and, if he had, it would have been of no avail; for, the very moment Mrs. Thompson was out of sight, so many of the servants began talking together, that no sounds his voice could produce would have been heard.

Jokes and gibes about Sir Matthew, mingled with ridiculous anecdotes and very cordial abuse of him and all his race, furnished the

first subject, and filled the first chorus. Then followed some facetious observations from Mr. Jennings concerning Mrs. Thompson, and a few of her peculiarities; and it was in the midst of the giggling which these occasioned that the kitchen-maid ventured to say—

“Well, now, you are all so keen, and so clever about her, that I wonder it don’t come into your heads to find out that she spoke just like an old fool, and no better, when she invented all that rigmarole about the boy. Master might be just the devil you says he is, and ten times worser too, for anything I know about him; but the worser he is, the farther I’d be, if I was such a mighty good gentlewoman as she thinks herself, from giving such a bad father out of my own invention to anybody—whether they comed out of the factory or not.”

“I do think Molly’s right,” said one of the housemaids. “What business has the old frump to find a father for him? Nobody asked her.”

“That may be all very true, Rebecca,” observed the lady’s-maid, shaking her head very gravely. “I know well enough that Mrs. Thompson does not always wait for right and reason before she speaks—but that makes no difference as to our having any familiarity

with this dirty little boy; for it certainly does appear plain enough that his mother is very little better than she ought to be."

"Lord bless us! and how much better be you than you ought to be, I should like to know?" said the fat cook, who had her own reasons for not being at all partial to Mrs. Wittington, her ladyship's waiting-maid.

"I!—You miserable lump of kitchen-stuff, that no man in his senses would ever deign to look upon twice! Do you dare to say that I'm no better than I ought to be?"

Now the cook was an Irishwoman; and, though she had famous black eyes, and teeth like an elephant, her principal claim to the coveted attentions of the other sex (setting aside the attractions which it is but fair to presume her profession gave her) arose from the ready sauciness of her tongue, which, in a brogue as strong as that of the Scotch gardener, and equally dangerous for the untaught to meddle with, was wont to rattle about her, right and left, sometimes scolding, but oftener making sport of all who crossed her humour.

Now this virtuous outbreak of Mrs. Wittington was too fair an opportunity to be lost; and accordingly, putting on as demure a look as her wicked eyes would let her, she

replied, "You be better than you ought to be, be you? Well now, that's a trouble for your conscious, isn't it?—Is there nobody as can help her out of it?—Think what it is, gentlemen, to be so burdened, and she, poor soul, unable to confess to a priest, seeing she's a heretic!—Oh! she's better than she ought to be! and you've her own word for it too, and that's the reason, you see, why she's obliged, whether she will or no, to turn her back on this poor little fellow, just because he's fatherless. Isn't that a sore strait for a young lady's conscious?—Praise and glory to the Holy Virgin, and all the company of saints, now and for ever more, that I beant one bit better than I ought to be, and I hope you beant neither, Molly; and so just run to the larder, will you, girl? and bring out something for supper fit for a hungry little boy that hav'n't the misfortune to be so burdened in mind as pretty Mrs. Wittington.—Oh! the poor soul! she's better than she ought to be!"

Molly, the kitchen-maid, did not wait for a second order; and, if a capital dish of cold cutlets could have set little Michael's heart at rest, he might then have been a very happy fellow: but, in truth, he was longing for his own porridge, by his own mother's bedside;

and, except from the relief afforded by a copious draught of milk, he went to the bed prepared for him by his friend, the kitchen-maid, so little elated in spirit, and so little thankful for the extraordinary change which had befallen him, that, had his noble patroness been made aware of it, she would, beyond all doubt, have punished his ingratitude, by requesting Sir Matthew to turn him out of doors again; and, moreover, have for ever abandoned the generous idea of surrounding his young head, as she poetically expressed it, with a halo of immortality, by means of getting Mr. Osmond Norval to relate his adventure in verse.

Sir Matthew Dowling went to his bed also, hardly better pleased with what had occurred than little Michael. But there was this difference between them; little Michael said his prayers, which the great Sir Matthew did not, but, on the contrary, spent his last waking moment in cursing, with great fervour of spirit, the folly of the hideous old maid who had entailed such a detestable burden upon him—the result of which, as a peace-offering to the whole body of operatives, was at any rate but problematical.

Nevertheless, when he awoke the next morning with his head quite cool, he felt disposed to

think more of the hint given him by his friend and favourite Dr. Crockley, and less of the inconvenience of having a few pounds to pay out of hundreds of thousands for a job, which, if well managed, might help, perhaps, to avert a monstrous deal of mischief.

With these rational thoughts working strongly in his ever-active brain, he rang his bell, and ordered that Joseph Parsons, his principal overlooker, should be sent for instantly, and shown into his study.

A short half-hour brought the master and man to a *tête-à-tête* in the snug little apartment described in the first chapter.

"Good morning, Parsons," said Sir Matthew.

The overlooker bowed his head respectfully.

"Have you heard any thing of this meeting at the Weavers' Arms, Parsons?" inquired Sir Matthew.

"As much as a man was likely to hear, Sir Matthew, who, as you will easily believe, was not intended to hear anything," replied the confidential servant.

"And how much was that, Parsons? Sit down, Parsons—sit down, and let us hear all about it."

"I was a coming, sir, if you hadn't a sent for

me," rejoined the overlooker; "for, to say truth, my mind misgives me that there's mischief brewing."

"I have heard as much," said the master; "but it can hardly have gone very far yet, if such a sharp-sighted fellow as you only suspect."

"That's true, sir," said the man, with a grim smile, in acknowledgment of the compliment; "and I've not been idle, I promise you. But all I know for certain is, that the people, old and young, our own people I mean, have, one and all, taken dudgeon about that girl Stephens, that died the week before last, just after leaving the mill. She had been at work all day in the spinning-mill, and who was to guess that she was that low?"

"It was a d—d stupid thing though, Parsons, to have a girl go on working, and not know whether she was dying or not."

"And how is one to know, sir? I'll defy any man to find out, what with their tricks, and what with their real faintings."

"You won't tell me, Parsons, that, if you set your wits to work, you can't tell whether they are shamming or not?"

"That's not the question, Sir Matthew, asking your pardon. There's no great difficulty

in finding out whether they are in a real faint, or only making the most of being a little sickish from standing and want of air. That's not the difficulty. The thing is to know, when they really take to the downright faintings, whether they are likely to live through it or not."

"And where is the great difficulty of that? You know Dr. Crockley would come at a moment's warning at any time, and feel their pulses."

"And he does do it, sir. But, in the first place, I doubt if any man can justly tell whether girls are likely to go on fainting, and up again, as lots and lots of 'em do for years, or drop down and die, as Nancy Stephens did. That's one thing; and another is, that Dr. Crockley is so fond of a joke, that 'tis rarely one knows when he speaks earnest, and when he does not. He *did* see Nancy Stephens, about a month ago, and all he said was, 'She do look a little pale in the gills, to be sure, but a dance would cure her, I have no doubt.' 'A dance!' says I, 'doctor. And please to tell me,' says I, 'how the work is to get on, if the factory boys and girls sets off dancing?'"

"'Maybe you haven't got a fiddle?'" said he.

“ ‘ Maybe I haven’t,’ ” said I.

“ ‘ Well, then,’ says he, ‘ if it don’t suit you to let them dance to the fiddle, I’ll bet ten to one you’ll be after making ‘em dance to *the strap*.’ And with that, if you’ll believe me, sir, he set off capering, and making antics, just as if there had been somebody behind a-strapping him. To be sure, it was fit to make one die of laughing to see him; but that’s not the way you know, sir, to do one any good as to finding out the real condition of the people.”

Sir Matthew could not resist a hearty laugh at this characteristic trait of his friend, but he concluded by acknowledging that Parsons was quite right in saying that this way of doing business was more agreeable than useful.

“ However, Parsons,” he continued, “ we must not talk about that now, for I have something else to say to you. It is quite plain that they are getting again to their grumblings; and Crockley, who you know is up to everything, says that he’ll bet his life they have got some new mischief into their cursed heads. Now this must be prevented, Parsons, some way or other; for any harm they can do the machinery is not the worst of it. ’Tis the rousing up people’s attention again, Parsons, there’s the danger. Just see

what they've done about the blackamoor slaves, by going on boring for everlasting, ding-dong, ding-dong, till they actually got the thing done at last. Now the Philadelphia people and the Boston people are just playing the very same game t'other side the water ; and, when they have got their way, where will their national wealth be, I should like to know? And where will our national wealth be, when these rascals have contrived to stop the mills instead of working them?"

"Lord have mercy upon us, Sir Matthew!—if you don't make me creep all over to hear you!" exclaimed Parsons. "'Tis a pity, sir, and often's the time I have said it, that you arn't in parliament yourself—you'd pretty soon show 'em what their meddling with factories would do for the country."

"'Tis likely I might, Parsons; but a man can't be in two places at once—and, depend upon it, there's good to be done here, if we knew how to set about it. I shall make you stare, perhaps, Mr. Parsons, when I tell you what I am about now. It came into my head by accident at first; but, if I don't greatly mistake, I'll make a capital thing of it before I have done."

"There's no doubt of that, Sir Matthew, if

you sets your mind to it, let it be what it will," replied the confidential overlooker; "and, if it isn't a secret, sir, I should like uncommon much to hear it."

"No, it's no secret, Parsons—anything in the world but that," replied Sir Matthew, laughing. "What should you say now, Mr. Superintendent, to my taking a dirty little dog of a piecer out of the factory into my own house, and dressing him, and feeding him, and lodging him, all for the love of pure benevolence and little boys?"

"I don't quite understand you, sir," replied Mr. Joseph Parsons, looking very grave.

"No, I dare say you don't. But I think I do, Parsons, and that's more to the purpose. Trust me, man, it will do good if it's only by giving the people something to talk of just now, besides this confounded girl's death. And now, my good fellow, tell me all you know of a boy called Michael Armstrong, for he, you must understand, is the hero of my tale."

"That's the boy, is it?—Then that's why the chap didn't come to work this morning," replied Mr. Parsons; "I knows him well enough, Sir Matthew, in course; for he's going on for eight or nine, and he comed to the factory just about five."

"And what sort of a boy is he, Parsons?"

"Nothing very particular, Sir Matthew, unless it is because of the unaccountable fuss he makes about his elder brother, who is but a poor rickety, shriveldy sort of a child. For some reason or other, his bones never seemed to come rightly straight, and this Mike makes as great a fuss about him as if he was his grandmother."

"Are the parents living?" inquired Sir Matthew.

"The mother is. She is a bedridden woman, and ought to be in the workhouse; but she's upish, and can't abide it, and so she lies abed, doing plain work and that, and the two boys' wages maintains 'em. But I did hear t'other day she had given in, and was a begging to go into the house, and take the eldest boy with her. These creturs never know what they would be at. I suspect, howsom-ever, that she has got hold of a notion that, because he's so cripplly, he beant to work no more; but I shall take care to see Butchel, the parish-overseer, about it. It is altogether a trick, that, what won't answer—his fingers is just as able to handle the reels and piece the threads as ever they was; and, in course, a little dwarf like him, with his legs like crooked

drumsticks, can't look for any but the youngest wages; so, after all, he's one of them as answers best."

"No! Parsons, no!" ejaculated Sir Matthew with sudden energy. "That woman must not go into the workhouse. The whole thing shall be got up, I tell you, in the best possible style. What d'ye say now to getting the woman arrested for debt?—or having all her things sold?—and we just stepping in at the very nick of time, to save her from destruction!"

There was something so truly comic in the expression of the knight's countenance, as he said this, that even the saturnine Mr. Parsons could not help laughing.

"If the born devils don't sing your praises through the country, sir," said he, as soon as he had recovered his gravity, "why we must find some other way to go to work with them."

"Now, then, be off, Parsons, and contrive some clever scheme or other to throw the *unhappy family* into a quandary."

"I understand, sir," said Parsons, nodding his head; and so parted the master and the man.

CHAPTER IV.

A little Cottage Gossip—A Visit of Charity—Practical Benevolence.

THE promptitude of the measures taken by Mr. Joseph Parsons, to bring to effect the wishes of his master, showed him to be deserving the post of confidence he held, as principal superintendent of Sir Matthew Dowling's factory. He lost not a moment in obtaining a short interview with one of the parish-officers, who was his particular friend, and then made his way to Hoxley-lane, with the intention of questioning the widowed mother of the two Armstrongs as to the situation of her affairs, and the particular species of misery from which she might, at that precise moment, be suffering the most.

The statement pronounced in Sir Matthew's kitchen respecting the general eligibility of Hoxley-lane as a place of residence was per-

fectly correct. It was the most deplorable hole in the parish. A narrow, deep-rutted parish-road (too hopelessly bad to be indicted), led from the turnpike down a steep hill to the town of Ashleigh. Exactly at the bottom of the hill, just at the point where every summer storm and winter torrent deposited their gatherings, there to remain and be absorbed as they might, began a long, closely-packed double row of miserable dwellings, crowded to excess by the population drawn together by the neighbouring factories. There was a squalid, untrimmed look about them all, that spoke fully as much of want of care as of want of cash in the unthrifty tribe who dwelt there. It was like the moral delinquencies of a corporate body, of which no man is ashamed, because no man can be pointed at as the guilty one. It was not the business of No. 1 to look after the filth accumulated in front of No. 2; and the inhabitants of No. 3 saw no use in mending the gate that swung on one hinge, because No. 4 had no gate at all; and the dogs and the pigs who made good their entry there of course found their way easy enough through the make-believe hedge, which throughout the row divided one tenement from another. The very vilest rags were hanging

before most of the doors, as demonstration that washing of garments was occasionally resorted to within. Crawling infants, half-starved cats, mangy curs, and fowls that looked as if each particular feather had been used as a scavenger's broom, shared the dust and the sunshine between them, while an odour, which seemed compounded of a multitude of villanous smells, all reeking together into one, floated over them, driving the pure untainted air of heaven aloft far beyond the reach of any human lungs abiding in Hoxley-lane.

"Where does widow Armstrong live?" demanded Mr. Parsons of a woman who was whipping a child for tumbling in the dunghill before No. 5.

"In the back kitchen of No. 12, please your honour," replied the woman, making a low reverence to the well-known superintendent.

"No. 12?—why, that's Sykes's tenement—and they're on the ground-floor themselves!"

"Yes, please your honour; but, since the rents have been raised by Sir Matthew, the Sykeses have been obliged to let off the back kitchen, and live in the front one."

"Why there's a matter of a dozen of 'em, isn't there?"

"Yes, your honour, they lies terrible close."

"Obstinate dolt-heads!—That's just because they pretend to fancy that it is not good for the small children to work. I know, for certain, that they have got two above five years that they won't send to the factory; and then they have the outdaciousness to complain that the rents are raised—as if, because they are above choosing to earn money in an honest way, Sir Matthew was not to make what he could of his own! It's disgusting to see such airs, where people ought to be thankful and happy to get work."

"That's quite true, no doubt, sir," answered the woman, continuing to shake, and occasionally to slap, the grub of a child she had taken off the dunghill. "But Robert Sykes's children are very weakly; and them as your honour talks of is almost too small—though 't isn't to be doubted that it is the bounden duty of us all to send 'em, sooner than see 'em starve."

"I fancy so, indeed," replied Mr. Parsons; adding, with a finger pointed at the squalling child, who still continued under the cleansing process above described, "And isn't it a comfort now, Mrs. Miller, to get rid of the plague of 'em?"

The woman ceased to shake her little boy,

and, looking for a moment at the clear blue eyes that, notwithstanding her rough discipline, were very lovingly turned up to her face, something like a shudder passed over her.

"Get along in with you, Bill," said she, as if afraid that the blighting glance of the superintendent should rest upon him; and then added, "As long as they be so very small, your honour, they can't do no good if they be sent."

"Stuff and nonsense! there's ways to teach 'em. But don't fancy that I want you to send your brats—confound 'em! They're the greatest plagues in natur; and nothing on God's earth but good-heartedness and love of his country would ever make Sir Matthew, for one, trouble himself or his men with any of the creturs.—No. 12, is it, where I shall find the widow Armstrong?"

"Yes, please your honour—you'll be sure to find her. She's a cripple, poor soul! and can't stir."

"She's made up her mind to go into the workhouse, hasn't she?" demanded the manager.

"Have she indeed, poor thing?" responded the woman, in an accent of compassion.

"I heard so, as I come along, and that's the reason I'm going to her. Our good Sir Matthew, who to be sure is the kindest-hearted man in the whole world, has taken a fancy to her boy, and he'll be a father to him, I'll be bound to say he will; and that's why I think he'd like me to give her a call, just to tell her not to fret herself about the workhouse. If she don't like going there, she needn't, I dare say, with such a good friend as she's got."

The woman stared at him with an air of such genuine astonishment that the superintendent felt disconcerted, and, turning abruptly away, continued his progress down the lane.

By the time he had reached No. 12, however, he had begun to doubt whether his sudden appearance at the bedside of the widow Armstrong might not produce an effect unfavourable to the object he had in view.

"As sure as steam's steam," thought he, "she'll be more inclined to fancy that I am come scolding about the boys for something than to take her part, or do her pleasure; so I'll just say a civil word to the Sykeses, and then stroll away on, till such time as the parish officers have been after her. I'll engage for it, that Sam Butchel won't let no grass grow under his feet after what I said to him; and

if I turn in when he's there, as if to see what was going on, it would certainly be more natural-like, and believable."

In accordance with this improved *projet de charité*, Mr. Joseph Parsons walked on; but he had not proceeded far ere, on turning his head round to reconnoitre, he perceived, not the tall and burly Sam Butchel, the overseer of the parish, but the lean and lathy person of little Michael, advancing with an eager and rapid step towards his mother's dwelling.

"Soh!" ejaculated the sagacious Parsons, "here comes the charity job! It would be worth a week's wages to hear him tell his own story."

Mr. Joseph Parsons had a Napoleon-like promptitude of action, which the unlearned operatives described by calling him "a-word-and-a-blow man," but which in reality often deserved the higher epithet above bestowed.

Scarcely had the thought of overhearing little Michael's tale suggested itself, ere a sidelong movement ensconced him for a moment behind a favouring pig-sty, from whence, unseen, he watched the boy enter the door of No. 12.

Again, Napoleon-like, he remembered all he had heard from her neighbour concerning the

position of the widow's dwelling-place; and, rightly judging that Sykes's back-kitchen must, in some way or other, be in a condition to favour the emission of sound, he troubled not the household by making his approaches through the principal entrance, but, striding over the inefficient fence of the tiny cabbage-plot behind, obtained a station as favourable to his purpose as he could possibly desire. This was a nook between a protuberance intended for an oven and the window close beside the widow Armstrong's bed, from whence prophetic fate, favouring the yet latent purpose of the manager, had caused three panes to be extracted by a volley of pebbles, intended for mother Sykes's cat, at least two months before.

To this safe and commodious crouching-place, he made his way just in time to hear the widow say,—“ Not understand one word of Edward's story, Mike ; so sit down, dear boy, and tell me all.”

“ Why, mother, 'tis like a story-book—and it's very fine to be sure—but yet—” And the boy stopped short.

“ But yet you don't like it, Mike ?” rejoined his mother. “ That's what you was going to

say. Tell the truth, my child, and don't go to keep nothing from me."

"That was it," said Mike.

"Ungrateful viper!" muttered the confidential superintendent between his closed teeth.

"Poor fellow! poor dear Michael!" exclaimed the woman, soothingly. "It was hard to go to sleep without kissing mother, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I didn't like that—nor I didn't like being without Teddy neither—and I didn't like the grumpy old lady as comed into the kitchen and abused me; nor the gentlemen servants either, except the gardener, and he took hold of my hand, and led me along kind enough—and I like Molly too, that's she as give me my supper and my bed, and my breakfast this morning, mother. Oh, mother! how I did long to bring away some of the milk and bread and butter home with me!"

"Never think of such a thing, for your life, boy!" exclaimed the mother eagerly. "It would be thieving, nothing else, Michael—nothing more nor less than thieving—never mention that again to me, dear, that's a darling."

"I won't, mother; but I know I shall think

of it every time I see them big pounds of butter, and jugs of milk, and minds how careful you be over your little scrimped bit in the broken saucer, and how you drinks your drop of tea without ever having any milk at all."

"Never you mind that, darling. But what are they going to do with you, Mike? And what for do they want to have you up at the great house? 'Tis a mystery to me, and, thankful as we ought to be for any help, I can't say but I should be easier in my mind if I understood something about it."

"Impertinent hag!" growled the surly Parsons from his lair. "Does she think they are going to trap him like a rabbit, for the sake of his skin?"

"But, mother, I don't understand anything about it myself," said Michael, rather dolefully.

To this avowal, no reply was made for some minutes; upon which the superintendent grew impatient, and, stretching forward his neck a little, contrived, athwart the sheltering branches of an elder-bush, to peep through the broken window.

To the agent of Sir Matthew Dowling's benevolence the sight that presented itself

was really revolting; though there may be others who would have been affected differently by it. Michael had flung himself across the bed; his arms were thrown round his mother, who was sitting upright with some piece of needlework in her hands, and his dark curls set off in strong contrast the extreme paleness of the face that looked down upon him. The widow Armstrong was still rather a young woman, and would still have been a very lovely one, had not sickness and poor living sharpened the delicate features, and destroyed the oval outline that nature had made perfect. Yet she had quite enough of beauty left to detain the eye; and such a history of patient suffering might be read in every line of her speaking countenance, that few ever looked upon her harshly. Spite of her extreme poverty, too, she was clean—her cap was clean, the bedclothes were clean, and the pale hands, too, looked so very white, that, if Mr. Parsons from his hiding-place had ventured to speak any opinion concerning her, he would certainly have given utterance to a strong expression of indignation at the abominable air of delicacy which her appearance displayed.

She looked as if she were struggling with

some painful feeling, but did not weep, though her boy did, heartily.

For a little while she suffered his tears to flow without interruption or reproof, and then she kissed him once, twice, thrice.

"There now, Michael," she said, looking at him fondly; "have you not played baby long enough? Stand up, darling, and listen to me. You don't seem over-glad, Mike, of this great change, and, if you did, perhaps I might have been over-sorry; but sorrow would be sin for either of us, when God has sent us help. 'Tis you that be the heartiest, Mike, and 'tis you that want food the most, growing at the rate you do, and heart-sore have I been at meal-times to see you so stinted. So never let us trouble ourselves any more about the reasons for your getting so into favour, but just thank God, and be contented."

"But, mother, how will you get on without me?" replied Michael, shaking his head; "I am sure that Teddy can't make your bed as I do—he hasn't the strength in his arms. And who's to fetch water? 'Deed and 'deed, mother, you'd better thank Sir Matthew, and say no, unless he'll just please to let Teddy go instead."

"That won't do, my dear child, in any way. 'Tis I must watch poor Edward. Little as I

can do for him, I don't think he'd like to part from me as long as God is pleased to let me stay."

"That's true, mother—that's very true! Teddy would break his heart. No, no, 't isn't he shall be parted from you; I'll show him how to make the bed, if I can't come over myself; but perhaps they'll let me, mother?"

"What's the business that you'll have to do, Michael?" inquired the widow.

"I haven't been told of any business yet," replied the boy.

"But you don't expect that you're going to be kept for nothing, dear?" said the mother, smiling.

"'T isn't for my work, mother; 'tis for the cow," replied Michael, gravely.

"The cow, child? What is it you and Teddy have got into your heads about a cow? A poor starved beast, he says it was, that wouldn't have frightened a mouse, and you made it turn round, Mike—that's all I can make out. But he must be mistaken surely. What was it you did about the cow, darling?"

At this question the boy burst into a hearty fit of laughter, which, to say truth, offended the listening ears of Mr. Joseph Parsons still more than his weeping had done.

"I'll do his business for him, he may depend upon it," thought he. "If master must have a charity job, he must; but it don't follow that the cretur shan't be made to know himself just as well as if he was in the factory. I'll be your overlooker yet, Master Mike."

Just as this prophetic sketching of the future had made itself distinctly visible to his mind's eye, the bodily senses of the agent announced to him that the tranquil tête-à-tête within the widow's chamber was disturbed by the entrance of persons whose voice and step announced that they were men. Mr. Parsons was at no loss to guess their errand. "Here they come!" muttered he. "Now we'll see how Master Butchel manages his job."

"We be comed to see," said a gruff voice within the widow's chamber, "whether or no you be comed to your senses, Mrs. Armstrong."

"Sir?" said the trembling woman in return.

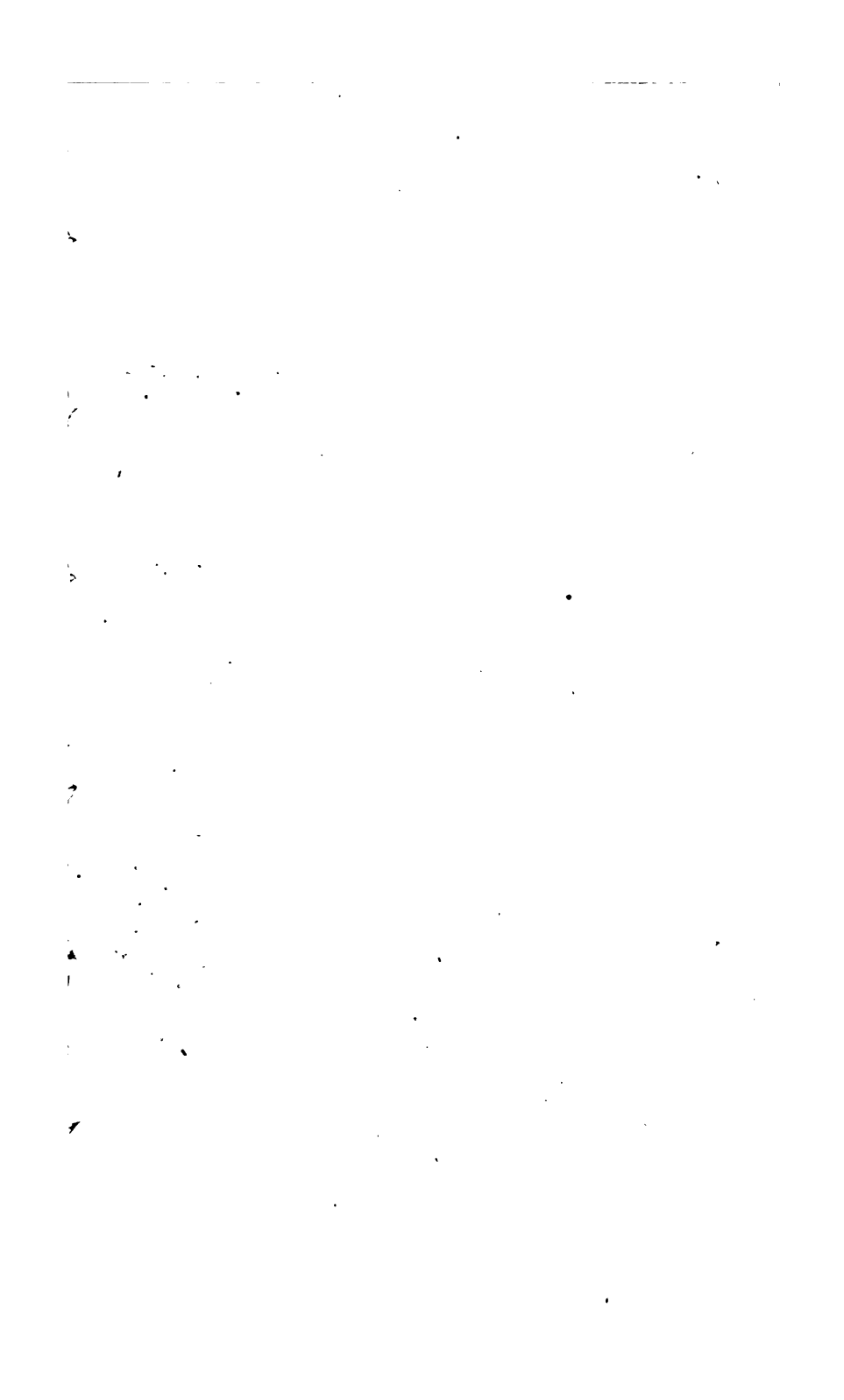
"You knows well enough what I means, without my going into it again; you knows well enough as I comes to talk to ye about the house again. We've had Larkins the baker coming to inquire if there's parish pay to look to for your bill, Mrs. Armstrong—and I have told him NO, not a farthing, not the quarter of

a farthing, unless you'll come into the house. The parish have gone on allowing you two shilling a-week, week after week, God knows how long—'tis a perfect shame and imposition, and the board says they won't do it no longer. You and the boys too may come in if you will, that's one thing ; but living here, cramming 'em with as much wheaten bread as they'll eat without paying for it, is another, and it's what no honest parish don't tolerate. I'll be bound to say, now, as you have brought up the scamps without their ever knowing the taste of gruel ? Tell the truth ; did you ever take the trouble to make a drop of gruel for 'em ?"

"As long as I had my legs to stand upon, sir, I never minded trouble ; and, when my husband was living, we did a deal better, and I have done cooking for 'em then, such as a few potatoes and a cabbage, maybe, with a scrap of bacon on a Sunday ; but, from the hour he died, we have never had a pot upon the fire."

"That's what 'tis to be so obstinate. If you'd come into the house you'd see the pot upon the fire all day long, a'most."

"But the children would be in one room, after they came from the factory, and I should be in another," pleaded the widow ; "and I've





Drawn and Etched by A. Kervick.

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got a few of the decent things as I married with, when I came from service, and it would be a grief to me to see 'em all sold."

"If the parish don't sell 'em, Larkins the baker will, you may take my word for that, Mrs. Armstrong," replied the overseer. "However, 'tis your business, not mine. Here's a decent, respectable man, as is ready to take all you've got at a valuation, fair and honourable, but that's just as you please. I only called, as in duty bound, to tell ye that the parish don't mean to continy no such extravagance as paying you two shilling a-week no longer."

"God help me!" answered the widow gently "If 'tis his will that so it should be, it would be a sin for me to complain."

"That's vastly fine, beant it?" said the brutal Butchel; "and now let's hear what you'll be after saying to Master Larkins, for here he comes, as sure as eggs be eggs."

An abrupt, and most peremptory demand, for three pounds two shillings and seven pence, was here made, by a sour-looking little man, who entered the small room without ceremony, making a group of intruders round the widow's bed, equally unwonted and unwelcome. Her over-taxed courage seemed to fail, for it was with something like a sob that she replied to

his demand by saying, "I shall have twelve shillings to take for needlework, when this is done, and you shall have it every farthing, sir, if you'll be so merciful."

"And who's to pay your rent, Missis Armstrong, if I may be so bold?" said Mr. Butchel.

The widow had not a word to say for herself, and covering her face with her hands, wept bitterly.

"Now's my time!" said Parsons to himself, as he stealthily crept from his hiding-place. "Now for Sir Matthew's benevolence." And, in a minute afterwards, his tall, gaunt figure, and hard countenance, were added to the company. The noise he made in entering caused the widow to uncover her eyes, and it was with an emotion little short of terror that she recognised the tyrant, at whose name her children's cheeks grew pale. Instinctively, she stretched out her hand, and took hold of that of Michael, who was still seated on the side of the bed. But the boy shook it off, as if his mother's love was a secret treasure that the overlooker must not see, and, suddenly standing up, he remained with his eyes fixed on the ground, and his hands hanging by his sides, as if petrified.

"Hollo!—why, what's the matter now? Is

all the parish come to wish joy to this good woman here?" said the overlooker, with as jocund an air as he could persuade his iron features to assume.

"Wish her joy?" responded the well-tutored parish-officer, "and for what, Mr. Parsons, if you please? For having an honest tradesman come upon her with the gripe of the law, in hopes to get what's his own? She's got into trouble, I promise you, and I don't very well see how she's to get out of it."

"You don't say so?" said the confidential agent. "What! is that you, Mr. Larkins, coming to take the law of a poor body this way? I didn't think you was so hard-hearted."

"I don't deserve that character, sir," replied the baker sharply; for, though desired to call and enforce his claim by the parish overseer, Mr. Larkins knew not a word about Sir Matthew's scheme of benevolence; "and the proof that my heart isn't harder than other people's," he continued, "is, that I gave the widow here credit for what has been, excepting a few ounces of tea, her whole and sole living for months past."

"And very kind of ye too," observed the conciliating superintendent.

"I should like to know, then, what became

of all the money the two boys got, besides her own needlework, and, of late, two shilling a-week from the parish, beside?" observed Mr. Butchel.

"Why, that is rather puzzling, I must say," replied Mr. Parsons; "but no matter for that, no matter for that, just now. This family have got a kind friend, I promise you."

"Yes, but it does matter," returned Larkins. "It can't be right, no how, for me to be out of three pounds two shillings and seven pence, and she with such lots of money."

"Indeed, indeed, sir," said the widow, once more looking up at him, "I have done my very best, paying a little and a little at a time, as you know I never stopped doing, only for two weeks that my biggest—that is my oldest boy, was making up time that was lost, when he was home sick, and so got no wages. But the seven shillings a-week that they get between 'em, and my uncertain bit of needle work, gentlemen, can't stand for food, and clothes, and rent—and a little soap to keep us decent, and a bit of firing to boil a drop of water—it can't do all that, gentlemen, without getting behindhand, when any making-up time comes in the factory."

"Well, then, that's just the reason why you

must come into the house," replied Butchel; "and, at any rate, you may depend upon getting no more money out of it."

Upon hearing these words, "the decent, respectable man," who was willing to take the widow's goods at a "valuation, fair and honourable," began examining the condition of a chair that stood near him; an operation which the widow eyed with the most piteous look imaginable.

"Come into the house, I tell you, without more ado," resumed Butchel. "And what, in God's name, d'ye think we want you in for but your own good? D'ye think the parish have a fancy for maintaining crippled women and children by way of a pleasure? 'Tis ruination any way; but when you're in we know the worst of it at once, and that's something. The boy's wages will go a bit to help, and at any rate there'll be no two shillings to pay, which is what the overseers hates above all things, and what they won't continy to do. So now I have said my say."

And here Mr. Butchel began to move his heavy person towards the door.

"Stop a minute, Mr. Butchel, if you please, sir," ejaculated Sir Matthew's superintendent. "I should be sorry to let you go back to your

employers under any delusion or mistake whatever; and the fact is, that this good woman, the widow Armstrong, is no more likely to go into the workhouse than you are yourself, Mr. Butchel — begging your pardon for naming such a thing,”

“Then I suppose as it’s yourself as means to keep her out of it, Mr. Parsons?” replied the parish officer jocosely.

“Not exactly me, myself,” replied the other in the same tone, “but it’s one as much more able as he is willing. It is Sir Matthew Dowling as intends to befriend her, and that not only on account of the general charitableness of his temper, which all who know him really well are quite aware is very great, but because that little boy as stands there, and who is one of our factory-children, saved a friend of Lady Dowling’s last night from something she looked upon to be a considerable danger.”

“And does Sir Matthew mean to see me paid?” demanded the baker.

“Upon my word, Mr. Larkins, that’s more than what I’ve got authority to say,” replied Parsons; “but, howsomever, I don’t think that you had best go on, just at this particular minute, to persecute about it, seeing that in course Sir Matthew won’t take it civil, when

he's being such a friend himself to the widow."

"I don't want do nothing uncivil to nobody," replied the baker, "but I don't quite understand this business. It is something new, isn't it, Sir Matthew setting up for a soft-hearted gentleman among the factory-folks."

"New to you, maybe, Mr. Larkins, but not to me," replied the trustworthy agent. "There isn't another to be found, look which way you will, that can be compared with Sir Matthew Dowling, for real, true, benevolent charitableness, when he finds proper objects for it."

The baker stared; the man of old chairs and tables scratched his puzzled head; the intelligent Mr. Butchel looked at the speaker with a knowing wink; the widow fixed her eyes upon her patchwork quilt; and little Michael in astonishment, which conquered terror, raised his eyes to the superintendent's face, while that worthy advocate of a master's virtues stood firmly, striking his stout cane upon the ground, with the air of a man ready to do battle with all the world in support of what he has asserted.

"Well, then, at any rate, my business is done and ended," said Mr. Butchel, moving off; "and

I wish you joy, Mussis Armstrong, of your unaccountable good fortune."

"Come along, Jim!" said the baker to the respectable dealer in seized goods; "there's nothing to be done to-day, that's clear. But I hope you'll remember the twelve shillings as you've promised me, Mrs. Armstrong?"

"I will indeed, sir!" answered the widow earnestly; and, on receiving this assurance, Mr. Larkins took his departure with his professional friend, leaving Mr. Joseph Parsons, the widow Armstrong, and her son Michael to carry on whatever conversation they might wish for, without interruption.

"Well, now, if I ain't glad they're gone, them fellows," said the superintendent, shutting the door after them. "You are a favoured woman, Mrs. Armstrong, to get rid of 'em as you have done, and I don't and won't question that you are thankful to those to whom thanks are due."

"I always wish to be so, sir," said the widow.

"Well, there's no hardship in that, I suppose. But about this son of yours, this young Master Michael; you must see to his doing his duty to his benefactor. If he was to prove ungrateful, Mrs. Armstrong, it is but fair to tell you that

I wouldn't undertake to answer for the consequences."

"God forbid he ever should be ungrateful to any as was kind to him!" replied the poor woman; but, indeed, sir, I don't think it is in his heart to be so. Since the day he was born, God bless him, I have had little besides love to give him; and indeed, sir, I think the child would die for me."

Michael slyly stole his little hand sideways under the bed-clothes, where it was soon clasped in that of his mother, but his eyes were again firmly riveted upon the ground.

"Ay, ay, that's all very well; but it has nothing to do in any way with his duty and obligations to Sir Matthew. What I want to know is, whether he is ready and willing to do that which Sir Matthew will require of him—that's the main question, you see, Mrs. Armstrong."

"And what will that be, sir?" said the widow, while Michael's eyes were again raised for a moment to the face of his taskmaster.

"He is to be made a gentleman of—that's to be the first work put upon him." The poor woman smiled, but little Michael shook his head. The superintendent appeared to pay no attention to either; but again striking his cane

magisterially on the ground, he added, "Let him make up his mind to do all that he's bid, and come back to Dowling Lodge with as little delay as possible."

With these words, and without deigning to bestow any species of parting salutation upon those to whom they were addressed, Mr. Parsons left the room.

CHAPTER V.

A separation of loving hearts—A specimen of finished composition—Condescension and generosity—Sir Matthew clothes little Michael with his own hands.

WHILE the superintendent, in his serpentine course homeward, scattered the tidings of his master's munificence towards the factory-boy, Michael Armstrong and his mother indulged themselves in a few parting words and very tender caresses; the mother continuing to repeat at intervals, "Be sure, darling, to be a good boy, and do what you're bid;" while the son reiterated his entreaties that she and Teddy would take care one of t'other, and have him back again, spite of everything, if they found that they could not do so well without him.

But, even while this went on, Michael was improving his toilet by putting on the more carefully patched garments which had hitherto been kept sacred for Sundays. When this operation was completed, and his hair, face,

and hands made as clean as the joint efforts of himself and his mother could contrive to make them, the little boy turned to leave the miserable shed that had been his home, with a reluctant step and heavy heart, retracing the short distance between his mother's bed and the door, once and again, to take another kiss, and to repeat, with increased earnestness, the questions, "Isn't there nothing more I can do for you, mother, before I go away?—and will you be sure to tell Teddy to stop for me, morning and night, at the gate in the lane, where it all happened?—will you, mother?"

But at length the lingering separation was completed, and Michael set off upon his return to Dowling Lodge. In the mean time, Sir Matthew himself had not been idle; but, retiring to his study, he composed a paragraph for the county newspaper, which, after considerable study and repeated corrections, was at length completed, and despatched by the post, in a feigned hand, the wax being stamped with the handle of the seal instead of his arms, and the postage paid.

The paragraph ran thus:—

"ENGLISH BENEVOLENCE.

"There is, perhaps, no class of men so cruelly misrepresented as the manufacturers"

of Great Britain. Surrounded on all sides by a population of labourers, crowded together exactly in proportion to the quantity of work the neighbouring factories are able to furnish, they are continually reproached both with giving too many hours of employment to their poor neighbours on the one hand, and with the poverty, which is the inevitable lot of operatives with large families, on the other.

“ That all manufacturers, however, are not the cruel, mercenary tyrants they are so often, and so unjustly, described to be, was shown within the last few days by an incident which occurred near the town of Ashleigh, not a hundred miles from D—l—g L—d—e. The owner of that splendid mansion, while escorting the amiable Lady — — round his grounds, had occasion to remark some symptoms of a very noble disposition in one of the children belonging to a neighbouring factory on his estate. On making inquiries, he discovered him to be the son of a poor widow, whose failing health made her and her orphan children peculiarly eligible as objects of charity. This fact having been satisfactorily ascertained, Sir M—th—w D—l—g gave way to the warm impulses of his generous heart, and, adopting the little orphan among his own children, at once

gratified the gentle feelings of his amiable nature, and set them an example which it is impossible they should ever forget. It is more easy for the recorder of this charming anecdote to relate thus the principal circumstances of it than to enter into any detail of the numberless delicate traits of character exhibited by Sir M. D—l—g in the course of the transaction. Those who know him thoroughly will, however, be at no loss how to supply these; and those who do not would scarcely understand the description, were it given with all the detail possible."

The value and the accuracy of the statements contained in this announcement belonged wholly to the author of it; the phraseology to a private MS. digest of newspaper eloquence, the result of many years of steady research, during which no morsel of fine writing that might assist in such occasional addresses to the public as the present had been ever suffered to flow down the stream of time, and perish, without having been first carefully noted in the knight's repertory of fine periods.

Having concluded this business, Sir Matthew Dowling rang his bell. As it was only the study-bell, it was answered, as usual, by one of the housemaids.

"Where is the little boy, my dear, that I sent into the servants' hall last night?" inquired Sir Matthew.

"Upon my word, Sir Matthew, I can't tell," she replied; adding, in that tone of familiar confidence which her master's condescension encouraged, "but if you sent him into the hall, Sir Matthew, he never got there, nor never will, you may take my word for that, as long as Madam Thompson reigns."

The housemaid was not a beauty—none such, as was before stated, ever made part of Lady Dowling's household; but she was a wit, and Sir Matthew was too clever himself not to feel the value of cleverness in others: he, therefore, raised his eyes in a comic grimace, very good-humouredly chucked the maid under her ugly chin, and, instead of putting himself in a rage, as might have happened under other circumstances, he only said, "And how was that, my dear? Come, tell me all about it—I like your stories, Peggy, they are always so funny."

"Whose stories wouldn't be funny, Sir Matthew, if they told of the airs and graces of Mother Thompson?" replied the lively damsel; "she's for all the world like an old owl, as sits winking his eyes and trying to look wise."

"But she's a prime favourite with my lady,

Peggy, and, into the bargain, knows a thing or two about soups and hashes; so we must be very respectful, my dear, in talking of her—but, as to her daring to say that the boy I ordered into the hall was to be turned out of it, that's rather more than possible, I think?"

"That's because you don't know Mrs. Thompson, Sir Matthew. I only wish you had heard and seen 'em last night, she, and the butler, and Mrs. Fine Airs, my lady's maid, and Mr. Fine Airs, my lady's footman! If it was not enough to make one sick, I wish I may never see you again, Sir Matthew."

"They are a confounded impertinent set of rubbish," replied Sir Matthew; but still without losing his good humour. "However, all people of fashion, that is, rich people, Peggy, always do have a confounded impertinent set of servants about 'em. That's one of the great differences between high people and low."

"To be sure you must know best, Sir Matthew," replied the saucy grisette, but with a look and accent somewhat ironical: "I don't mean to doubt that in the least, I'm sure; but in the places I've lived at—Lord Wilmot's, Lord Crampton's, and such like—I never *did* hear of my lord's commands being treated in that fashion. They might have their jokes in the

hall, and the housekeeper's room too, no doubt of it, and impudent enough if you like it; but for downright flat disobedience, I never did hear of such a thing."

Sir Matthew, on hearing this, became rather white about the lips and red about the forehead; but Peggy knew the rising storm was not at all likely to fall on her, so, nothing daunted, she went on.

"I don't think I should have taken much notice about it, Sir Matthew, if it hadn't been for not liking to see you treated with disrespect; for I'm not over and above partial to beggar-children myself: but that sort of natural dislike was nothing in comparison to my feelings about you, sir; and if I had been placed in power, instead of having none, your will would have been obeyed, if every servant in the house had flowed at me for it."

"You're an excellent girl, Peggy," replied the knight, approaching her very condescendingly. "You know well enough that you are a favourite, and I know well enough, my dear, that you deserve to be so; and I tell you what, Peggy, I'll take care to let those animals, my servants, know that I am master here, as well as in the factory—and that my word's law!"

"And so it ought to be, Sir Matthew," re-

plied the obedient domestic. "I hope I know my duty too well to dispute my master's will in any thing;" and as she spoke she very meekly yielded herself to receive the condescending salute with which Sir Matthew was pleased to reward her excellent sentiments.

"You are an excellent good girl, Peggy!" he resumed after this little interruption; "and don't fear but I shall find means to reward you. But you must give me your help, my dear, to confound the impertinence of these fellow-servants of yours: if I don't make 'em wait upon that beggar's brat as if he was their lord and master, never trust me with a kiss more. Where is the little factory vermin, Peggy?"

"I ain't able to answer you, Sir Matthew; all I know is, that Mrs. Thompson marched us all out of the kitchen, where she sat in judgment on him last night, and there he was left with the kitchen-maid and the fat cook; but what's come of him since, I am no ways able to say."

On hearing this, Sir Matthew raised his hand towards the bell, but, suddenly recollecting himself, he smiled and said, "No, no, that won't do, Peggy, will it? Go, my dear, and ask where the boy is, and then come back and tell me."

The damsel, in return, furtively smiled too, in acquiescence and approval of his discretion; and, upon leaving his study for the purpose of prosecuting her inquiries among the servants, she encountered the object of them, as he entered the back door on his return from visiting his mother's cottage.

"Soh! here you are then! Well, you must come along this minute to Sir Matthew," said she, addressing him somewhat gruffly, and not too well pleased, perhaps, at this interruption to the confidential conversation with her master, which it had been her purpose to renew. But to the ears of Michael the name of Sir Matthew was sufficient to render all other words indifferent; and, conscious only that into his dreaded presence he must go if commanded to do so, he followed the girl with a beating heart, and in a few minutes stood, pale and almost breathless, before the awful countenance of the great man.

Sir Matthew gazed at him for a moment with a sort of sneer, which, if interpreted skillfully, would have been found to address itself inwardly. Sir Matthew could not choose but sneer at the whimsical arrangements of accidents which had converted him into a Mr. Allworthy. The sneer, however, as far as it

concerned himself, had no mixture of contempt in it. "Had another done this thing," thought he, "should I not have called him fool? And is it not ninety-nine chances to a hundred that thereby I should have described him truly? May the same be said of me? No! by the living God, it may not! How now, little boy! You have made yourself smart, I see—vastly fine, indeed! An inch of clean dowlas, a piece of span-new green baize for a patch, a pair of bony legs without stockings, and magnificent shoes—I did not say a pair, Peggy—but very magnificent shoes; one I suppose won in battle from a giant, and the other from a dwarf. Fine as a prince! isn't he, Peggy?"

As he thus jeered the little fellow, his eye wandered with malignant jocularitv over his person, which was, in truth, the very model of make-shift poverty; while the child, as if he felt his eye palpably crawl like a reptile over him, shuddered he knew not why.

Then, changing his tone so suddenly as to make even the confiding Peggy start, he continued, "You horrid lump of rags, stand back—stand back! back! back! behind that high chair—d'ye hear? Stand close and stand still.—If he does not make me as sick as a dog, Peggy, let me never smell musk more!"

"He does smell horrid bad to be sure, Sir Matthew!" replied the girl. "Hadn't I better take him back to Molly, the kitchen-maid, and make her scour him?"

"No, hang him—that won't take it out of him—I know 'em all. No, Peggy, let the scouring alone, and just go up stairs to the nursery-maids, and tell them to send me down a good handsome suit of clothes, complete, of Master Duodecimus's—he is the nearest in size to this scaramouch; and I will dress him, Peggy, as if he were the son of a duke. It will be fun, capital fun, and will it not be generous, Peggy?"

"Generous, Sir Matthew? It will be past all belief! What! him to be dressed up in the clothes of Master Duodecimus? oh, my! Sir Matthew, you must sure-ly be joking?"

"I'm as serious as an undertaker, girl. Get along with you, and do what I bid you—the longer you are about it, mind, the longer I shall have to sit in the same room with the ragamuffin in his own full dress—so make haste, if you please."

This was said in a manner to remove all doubts as to the munificent knight's being in earnest; and the active Peggy went and returned with as little delay as was consistent

with the necessity she felt herself under of entering into some short explanation with the nursery ladies; one and all of whom seemed much inclined, on the first opening of her mission, to treat the whole business as a hoax. When at length, however, she had succeeded in making it apparent that Sir Matthew was waiting for the suit of clothes in a most monstrous outrageous passion of a hurry, the messenger's arms were speedily loaded in exact conformity to the orders she had brought, and she returned to the knight's study with all that was needful to convert the rude exterior of little Michael into the nearest resemblance that nature would permit to the elegant and accomplished Master Duodecimus.

Considering the loathing and disgust manifested by Sir Matthew towards the person and the poverty of his *protégé*, it was extraordinary to see the amusement he seemed to derive from dressing him up. Though the alert and obedient Peggy stood close by to do his pleasure, it was his own large hands that thrust the little limbs of Michael into the clothing he chose they should wear, and it was amidst shouts of laughter from both that the ludicrous metamorphosis was completed.

But somehow or other, when they had finished

their masquerading work, the result was not altogether what Sir Matthew anticipated. The clothes were very handsome, well-made clothes, and as poor Michael, notwithstanding his leanness, was a very handsome, well-made boy, the incongruity between them seemed to vanish in the most unaccountable manner, as the operation drew towards a conclusion.

Peggy, however, was not such a fool as not to understand what was expected of her: so when the knight, catching up his son's tasselled cap, pressed it down upon the little curly head as a lusty packer of worthless goods thrusts down the cover that is to enclose them, and then pushed the child towards her with an impulse that nearly brought him upon his nose, she very judiciously renewed her noisy laughter, exclaiming, "Did any one ever see such a little quiz!"

"Quiz, girl?" replied Sir Matthew, eyeing him with no very fond expression. "It would be well for the scamp if that was the worst you could say of him—I know a thing or two, Peggy, and that boy will be lucky if he gets drowned. I'll bet a hundred guineas, that, with a few lessons, he would forge any writing you could show him; and before he is twenty, he will have taken as many shapes as Turpin.

That boy was born with a halter round his neck—I want no gipsy to tell me that.”

During the whole of the undressing and redressing operations, the boy's cheeks had been dyed with blushes, and his eyes so fixedly nailed to the floor, that neither Sir Matthew nor his maid had been able to enjoy their embarrassed expression; but as this dark prophecy fell on him, he looked up, and it was well for him that his munificent patron at the same instant turned his mocking glances towards the servant, as he said, “There—gather up his rags, girl, and be sure you wash well after it;” for, had he met that speaking young eye, he could hardly have misunderstood the scorn that shot from it. As it was, however, he saw nothing but the patched garments that were scattered round, and, once more sneering as he looked at them, he added, “Lead the little blackguard through the servants’-hall, and into Mrs. Thompson’s parlour—d’ye hear, Peggy, up to her very nose—and tell her that I have sent him to pay her a visit, and when she has had enough of the compliment, lead him round to Mademoiselle’s room, and we’ll have a little fun among the children.”

By no means displeased with an errand which permitted her to affront with impunity

the autocrat of all the offices, Peggy gathered together Michael's discarded wardrobe, and then clutching hold of his hand, led him, *bon gré mal gré*, to the presence of the imperious housekeeper.

Mrs. Willis, my Lady Dowling's own maid, and Mr. Jennings, my Lady Dowling's own man, were enjoying with that important functionary a slight morning repast of fruit, cakes, and wine; and at the moment Peggy and her charge entered, they were enjoying some very excellent jokes together. But Mr. Jennings no sooner cast his eyes on the little factory-boy, than he arose, looking rather abashed at being caught by a drawing-room guest of even nine years old, with a glass of claret in one hand, and a slice of pine-apple in the other.

Peggy, to whom the conciliatory smiles of this gay gentleman did not descend, enjoyed his mystification exceedingly; and relaxing her rough hold of Michael's wrist, she led him respectfully towards the table, saying, "My master has sent this young gentleman to pay you a visit, Mrs. Thompson; perhaps he would like a little fruit. There, my dear, that's the housekeeper Sir Matthew told you of; and if you will please to go and sit down by her, I dare say she will give you something nice."

Mr. Jennings immediately placed a chair beside the gracious Mrs. Thompson, who, after filling and setting before the young gentleman a plate with whatever she supposed would be most agreeable, said in a half whisper to his conductor, "Who is it, Peggy? I didn't hear never a carriage."

Before she could, or at least before she would, answer, Michael, who had not accepted the chair offered to him, took his cap from his head, and with considerably more courage than he had yet shown, said, "I am Michael Armstrong, the factory-boy."

"Who? What?" screamed the housekeeper; "What bold joke is this, Mistress Peggy Perkins? Do you think you have got a patent for your place, that you dare play such tricks as this?"

"If I keeps my place, I don't think I shall have to thank you for it, ma'am," replied the favoured housemaid, with very little civility. "My master ordered me to bring the boy to *pay you a visit*: those was his very words, Mrs. Thompson; and as I was bid, so I have done."

"There's some people as will do everything and anything they are bid," observed Mrs. Willis, again drawing out her favourite smelling-bottle, while with the other hand she ex-

tended a wine-glass to Mr. Jennings, for a little Madeira, which she felt was absolutely necessary to support her in this very disagreeable emergency. "Master, or no master, Sir Matthew Dowling doesn't know how to behave himself—it's I says it, and I don't care who repeats it to him."

Mr. Jennings stared at the factory-boy for a full minute very attentively, and then gave a long low whistle, at the same time turning his eyes with a look of much intelligence full in the face of the housekeeper.

"He isn't at all like any of 'em, Mrs. Thompson," said he.

Mrs. Thompson shook her head. "There is nothing at all in that, Mr. Jennings, I am sorry to say. But remember I do desire, and insist, that the subject is never alluded to in my presence again. When I lived with his grace, I always made it a rule that none of the household should ever discourse in my presence of anything that it was not decent to hear."

"Well, ma'am," said Peggy; "when you have done looking at him, he is to go into Momsell's room for the children to see him."

The housekeeper, the lady's maid, and the

footman, all simultaneously lifted up their hands and eyes to heaven.

"Please to let me put on my old clothes and go home," said Michael.

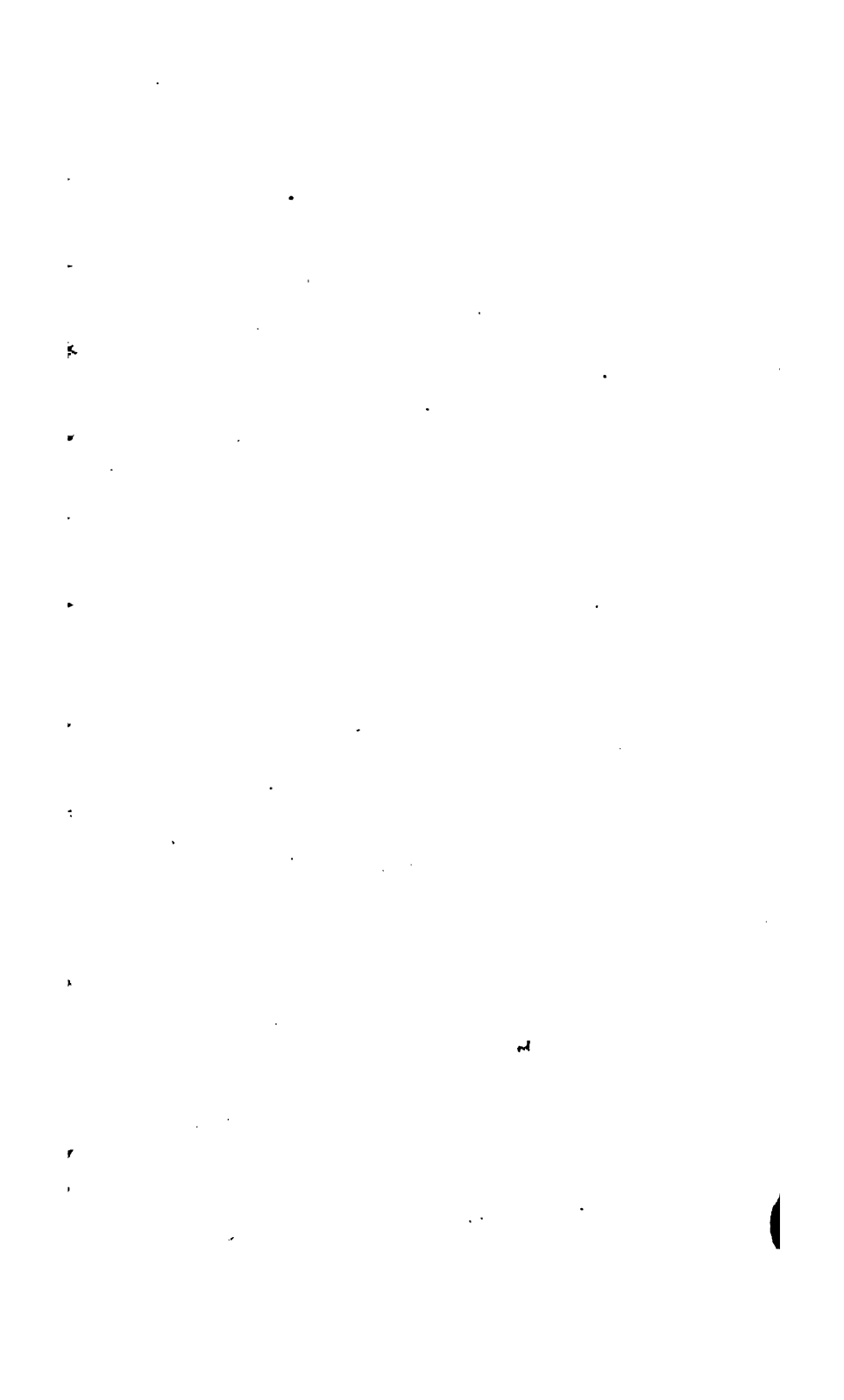
"You little ungrateful wretch!" exclaimed Peggy; "when Sir Matthew dressed you up himself with his own hands. What d'ye mean by that, you bad boy?"

"They'll laugh at me," said Michael, resolutely; "and I don't like it."

"You don't? Isn't that a good one?" said Mr. Jennings, clapping his hands in ecstasy. "Oh, Lord! pray let us have him back again, Mrs. Peggy, that is to say if Sir Matthew can bear to part with him. He's the finest fun I've got sight of this many a day."

"You must find fun for yourself, Mr. Jennings, for I shan't be at the trouble of bringing you none," replied the self-satisfied Peggy, again seizing the hand of Michael, and leading him off.

"Well, for a broom-maid, I hope she's saucy enough," said Mr. Jennings; but the subject of his remark was already beyond hearing, threading her way through the long stone passages which conducted to the opposite wing of the mansion, the whole of which was appropriated to the younger branches of the Dowling family.





What a pretty little scene

CHAPTER VI.

Michael's introduction to all the Miss Dowlings—Sir Matthew feeds him with his own hand, and presents him to all his most valued friends.

HAVING given a sharp rap on the door, Peggy was told to "Com een," by the voice of Mademoiselle Beaujoie; whereupon she threw the door wide open before her, and stood with Michael Armstrong in her hand, in the presence of three grown-up Miss Dowlings, three middle-sized Miss Dowlings, two little Miss Dowlings, and their French governess.

The five youngest all rushed as by one accord towards Michael. "What a pretty little boy!" was exclaimed by two or three of them. "Are you come to play with us? Mayn't we have a holiday, Ma'mselle?"

"What an elegant-looking creature!" exclaimed the eldest Miss Dowling, who with her two grown-up sisters had come into the room for the advantage of practising duets on

a venerable pianoforte totally out of tune, and whose loudest note could by no means compete with the shrill accents of the animated group who inhabited the apartment. "Did you ever see a prettier boy, Harriet?"

"Who is he, I wonder?" replied the young lady she addressed.

"How he blushes!" said the governess, tittering.

"What's your name, dear?" demanded Miss Martha, the third daughter of the Dowling race.

"Michael Armstrong, ma'am," replied the boy, looking up with an air of surprise, for Miss Martha, queer-looking as she was, spoke kindly. And queer-looking as she was Michael met her eye with pleasure, for that too spoke kindly, though it was neither large nor bright.

Martha Dowling was, in truth, about as ugly as it was possible for a girl of seventeen to be, who was neither deformed nor marked by the smallpox,—short, fat, snub-nosed, red-faced, with a quantity of sandy hair, that, if not red, looked very much as if it intended to be so; eyes of a light, very light grey, and without anything whatever in external appearance to recommend her, except a smooth, plump neck and shoulders, with hands and

arms to match, which, in truth, were very fair and nice-looking, and a set of well-formed, stout white teeth.

What made the unlucky appearance of this young lady the more remarkable, was the contrast it presented to the rest of her family. All the other young people were, like both their parents, "more than common tall," for their respective ages, and, like most other tall young people, rather thin, so that Lady Dowling was apt to indulge herself by declaring that, "Though certainly some of her children might be considered prettier than the rest, there was not one of the whole set (except that poor vulgar Martha) who was not most particularly genteel looking."

"*Genteel looking*" she certainly was not, nor graceful, nor beautiful in any way; and the consequence was, that father, mother, brothers, and sisters, were all most heartily ashamed of her. This was a misfortune, and she felt it to be so pretty sharply, for poor vulgar Martha was far from being a stupid girl. But, in her case, as in a million of others, it might be seen that adversity, though

" Like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Weareth a precious jewel in its head:"

for of all her race she was the only one whose

heart was not seared and hardened by the ceaseless operation of opulent self-indulgence. She felt that she was rather an object of pity than of admiration, of contempt than of envy, of dislike than of love. This is severe schooling for a young girl's heart, but if it produce not reckless indifference, or callous insensibility, it often purifies, softens, and even elevates the character. Such were its effects on Martha Dowling: that coarse-seeming exterior contained the only spark of refinement of which the Dowling family could boast. Never did a high-born Hidalgo, in Spain's proudest days, inculcate among his race the immeasurable importance of pure descent with more ceaseless or more sedulous earnestness, than did Sir Matthew the omnipotence of wealth among his. Every child was taught, as soon as its mind became capable of receiving the important truth, that not only was it agreeable to enjoy and cherish all the good things which wealth can procure, but that it was their bounden and special duty to make it visible before the eyes of all men that they could, and that they did, have more money spent upon them, than any other family in the whole country; but Martha felt that all this could not apply to her.

Strange to say, the only tie resembling affection which prevented the total isolation of this poor girl among her family, was that which existed between her hard-natured father and herself; but it was a sentiment not easy to analyze. In Sir Matthew it probably arose at first from his having been told that the little girl was very like him; and, on hers, from his being the only person in the house who had ever bestowed a caress upon her. In both cases, cause and effect went on increasing. Martha's face (saving its expression) was incontrovertibly like her father's; and, for that reason, or from the habit it had at first created, her father, though rather ashamed to confess it, was certainly very fond of her.

That, as a child, she should love him in return was almost inevitable; but that, as she advanced in years, she should feel for the being, the most completely formed by nature to be hateful to her, an affection the most unchanging and devoted, had something of mystery in it less easy to be explained. Yet, so it was. Martha Dowling adored her hard-hearted, vicious, unprincipled, illiterate, vulgar father, as heartily as if he had been the model of everything she most admired and approved. Nay, it may be, that she loved

him better, or, at any rate, more strongly still; for it was rather with fanaticism than devotion, or like the pitying fondness with which a mother doats on a deformed child, who sees only that because it is less loveable it has more need of love than the rest.

It was not, however, on the same principle that Sir Matthew's affection for his ugly daughter increased as years rolled on: for he saw that, though as a child she had been like him, she was now grown very plain; and, in company, he felt almost as much ashamed of her, as Lady Dowling herself. But he could not mistake her love and true affection, nor resist the charm of feeling that at least there was one being in existence who would have cherished him, even if he had not been the great man he was.

In private he scrupled not to yield to this feeling, and certainly derived considerable pleasure from it; but, before witnesses, he always joined in the family tone respecting "*poor Martha*," and scrupled not to push her on one side, upon all occasions on which any display of Dowling elegance was contemplated.

It was this ugly Martha Dowling who now startled little Michael with her voice of kind-

ness, and, notwithstanding all her lady mother said about the "horrid vulgarity of her manners," poor Martha had a sweet and gentle voice. The child looked up at her, and with the weakness that appeared constitutionally peculiar to him, his eyes were immediately filled with tears. Yet Michael was not a whimpering boy either; many had seen him harshly treated, for he had worked almost from babyhood in the cotton-factory, but nobody had ever seen him cry under it. But if his mother, or his poor sickly brother, touched his little heart, either with joy or tenderness, he would weep and laugh both with very infantine susceptibility. So it was with him now, for when Martha added with a good-humoured smile, "And what brings you here, Master Armstrong?" he laughed outright as he replied, "Indeed, ma'am, I ain't Master Armstrong, and I don't know a bit what I be here for."

This speech, though addressed to Martha, being heard by all, the contrast between his appearance and his language considerably excited the curiosity of the two eldest Miss Dowlings.

"La, how he talks! I thought he was a

gentleman by his jacket, more ~~and~~ you, Arabella?" said Miss Harriet.

"Yes, to be sure I did," replied the eldest sister. "But I am sure he is *not*, with that horrid way of speaking. What did you bring him here for, Peggy?" continued the young lady with an air of authority.

"Because master bid me, miss," was the satisfactory reply.

"Well to be sure, that is queer! I suppose he's the son of somebody or other, or papa would never have sent him in to us. It is not at all his way to patronise vulgarity. Where do you live, young gentleman?"

Michael looked very much as if he were in danger of laughing again, but he did not, and replied very demurely, "In Mr. Sykes's back kitchen, ma'am, in Hoxley-lane."

Though the answer was addressed to the inquirer, his eye turned to Martha, as he uttered it, as if anxious to see how she bore it; but he encountered a look that altogether puzzled him: for though it was at least as kind as before, there was uneasiness in it, and she looked round her, as if uncomfortably doubtful of what would happen next.

She did not, however, wait long for the result:

for Miss Sophia, Miss Louisa, and Miss Charlotte, the three middling-sized Miss Dowlings, who had approached very near to the little boy, and were even growing so familiar that Miss Charlotte had taken hold of one of his dark curls, were severally and suddenly drawn off by the respective hands of their two eldest sisters and the governess.

"Then he is not a young gentleman after all?" said Miss Sophia.

"La, how funny!" exclaimed Miss Louisa. "Where *did* he get his clothes from?" interrogated Miss Harriet.

"Most likely he stole them," responded Miss Arabella.

"Why, 'tis Duodecimus's jacket!" ejaculated the observing Miss Charlotte.

"Oh ! quelle horreur !" cried the governess, driving her pupils all before her to the other end of the room.

At this moment, and before any more active measures could be resorted to for the safety of the young ladies, the door of the school-room was again thrown open, and the portly person of Sir Matthew appeared at it, accompanied by the globe-like figure of Doctor Crockley.

"Good morning, young ladies !" said the

proud father, looking round him, and immediately entering into the jest that he saw was afloat. "How do you like the young beau I have sent you?"

"Good gracious, papa!" exclaimed the elegant and much-admired Miss Arabella, "he is a beggar-boy and a thief!"

Sir Matthew, and his friend Doctor Crockley, both burst into such a shout of laughter at this sally, that it was a minute before either of them could speak; but at length the knight, turning to the doctor, said,

"Leave my girls alone, Crockley, for finding out what's what; I don't believe there's one of them but what would have found that fellow out, if I had wrapped him up in the king's own mantle."

"They are sharp enough, there is no doubt of that," replied his friend; "but I must say you don't perform your charitable acts by halves, Sir Matthew. You have dressed up the little scamp so superbly, that nothing but the vulgar dark complexion could make one know that that he was not one of your own."

"Why, yes, there is some difference in the skins, I must say," replied Sir Matthew, looking with most parental complacency on the

fair skins, flaxen hair, and light eyelashes of his race.

“Difference, indeed! ’Tis Africa and Europe. And is it not remarkable, Sir Matthew, to see the look of him? Hasn’t he got a sort of slavish, terrified air with it? I tell you what, Sir Matthew, I should not be at all surprised to find, when the march of philosophy has got a little farther, that the blackamoor look comes along with the condition, and, that the influence of wealth and consequence is as quickly shown upon the external appearance of men, women, and children, as a field of clover upon the inferior animals. And why not? It is quite natural—perfectly conformable to the analogy, that, by accurately tracing cause and effect, may be followed through all creation. You have a head, Sir Matthew, for that sort of thing: you can understand me, if nobody else can.”

The little doctor knew that this was *one* of the soft points at which his wealthy neighbour was assailable. Sir Matthew loved to be assured that his head was of a superior fabric.

“But why, papa, should you send a nasty beggar-boy to us, with Duo’s clothes on?” inquired the intelligent Louisa. Before he

replied to this, the knight exchanged a glance with his friend, which seemed to say, "That's the right sort—she's in the clover-field."

"I have taken him in for charity, my dear," replied the knight, with a sort of pomposity that seemed of a new pattern. The young ladies had never seen papa look so before. Martha, from having found herself rather more frequently the object of Dr. Crockley's jokes than she desired, had, on his entering the room, retired to the window, but now she came up to her father, and quietly, and, as often happened, almost unnoticed, kissed his hand.

"For charity!" exclaimed the fair-haired Arabella, moving a step or two farther away from the object of this extraordinary caprice. "La, papa! why don't you send him to the hospital?"

Doctor Crockley laughed outrageously. "That girl, Sir Matthew," he said, when he had recovered his voice, "that girl is beyond all comparison the most thoroughly-born lady that ever I happened to hit upon—and that is saying something, I promise you. She hasn't a commonplace vulgar notion in her from top to toe. It is what I call the physiology of wealth—it is, upon my soul—it is

a study, a science. I have not got to the end of it, but I am certain I shall make a system out of it—and you'll be able to follow me—there's some comfort in that. I declare to God, that if I had not found you in the neighbourhood, I should have bolted. I cannot exist without occasionally bringing my mind in contact with superior intellect: you find that, too, Sir Matthew, I'm sure you do?"

Sir Matthew assured him that he did, very much; and then, pulling a Belinda lock that adorned the olive-coloured throat of Mademoiselle Beaujoie, he asked her if she had ever seen a brat, taken in for charity, so nicely dressed as that little blackguard."

"Brawt ? ça veut dire petit vaut rien. No, my honor Sire Matue, nayver ! You are viddout no reval de most——"

Whilst the French governess struggled to find a word sufficiently expressive of admiration, and, if possible, with some little meaning besides, Sir Matthew took the liberty of pinching her ear, while he whispered into it, "What, you little rogue ? What ?"

She gave him a Parisian *œillade*, by no means an unkind one, and turned away, while the two smallest Miss Dowlings ran up to her, and, in the jargon in which their mamma

and papa delighted, demanded "Si papa voulait let them jouer avec the little beggar-boy?"

This question, repeated nearly in the same words by Mademoiselle Beaujoie to the knight, appeared to cause him some perplexity, and, after reflecting upon it for a minute, he turned to consult his philosophical friend.

"I say, Crockley, what do you think of that?" Then, lowering his voice, he added, "You comprehend the job, doctor,—which will do best to help it? Parlour or kitchen, school-room or factory, drawing-room or scullery?"

"All and every of them," replied his friend, in the same low tone, but very decisively. "No doubt in nature about that, Sir Matthew; he must be here, there, and everywhere, and the thing will fly like mad."

"You are always right, Crockley: there is nobody like you," replied the grateful knight, cordially slapping the round shoulders of his friend. "I twig, I twig, and so it shall be, by the Lord Harry!"

"You are as rapid as lightning, Sir Matthew! I remember no instance of a cerebral formation so absolutely perfect as yours. Now, then, let us visit my lady, shall we? I am as dry as brickdust, and it is about lunch-

time I take it. Bring the boy with you, and introduce him before the servants in style."

"So I will—that's it—I twig, Crockley. Go, Martha, and see if the luncheon is laid."

The report being favourable to the wishes of the gentleman, the party, consisting of the three eldest Miss Dowlings, their papa and the doctor, left the young ladies and their governess to dine, while, with little Michael, who was ordered to follow, they all repaired to the dining-room, where a well-covered table awaited them.

Her ladyship and Mr. Augustus were already there, and both expressed exactly the degree of curiosity which the knight desired, as to who the little gentleman might be whom they brought with them.

Miss Dowling, and Miss Harriet Dowling, burst into a loud laugh; Sir Matthew looked towards the sideboard, and seeing two servants in attendance there, spoke as follows:—

"My dear Lady Dowling, I must bespeak your munificent charity, and universal benevolence, in favour of this little unhappy boy. His mother is a widow, and—and something, I forget exactly what, is very unhappy about her—and this little boy behaved remarkably well——" Here Sir Matthew broke off in some

little degree of embarrassment, not wishing particularly to impress upon his lady's mind that it was his tender care for the Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, which had first introduced the fortunate factory-boy to his notice. But he passed all that over very skilfully, and ended his harangue by saying, "I know perfectly well, my dear lady Dowling, that there is not in the whole world so amiable a person as yourself, and therefore I entertain not the slightest doubt that the benevolence which warms my heart on this occasion will communicate itself to yours."

Lady Dowling raised her light eyebrows, and her still lighter eyelashes, into a look of the most unmitigated astonishment, and remained thus for a while, contemplating the extraordinary spectacle, of one of the handsomest boys she had ever seen, dressed in a style of unquestionable fashion, and presented to her as a being so deplorably miserable, as to have excited the pity of her husband. The first clear and distinct idea that suggested itself was, the necessity of inquiring respecting this beautiful child's mother, and of finding out whether she might not happen to be beautiful too: the next arose from the sudden recognition of her

own son's own clothes, and the complexion of the lady became extremely florid.

"I should like to know where he got those clothes from," she said, in accents that by no means spoke composure of spirit.

"My dearest love," replied the most amiable and the most polite of husbands, "that is entirely my doing. You have known me long enough, my sweetest, to be aware that I never do any thing by halves—I saw that little fellow ragged and wretched, and I clothed him!"

"Well, I must say, I do think——" began her ladyship, when Sir Matthew, seating himself at the table, thrust a knife and fork into the very centre of a pigeon-pie, and accompanied the act by a sound, something between a slight cough and a grunt, which, in language matrimonial, was known to mean, "You had better hold your tongue and mind your business." Whereupon, Lady Dowling sat down too, but her fair complexion was rather more rosy than was becoming, and it was in no very sweet voice that she said to Martha, who ventured to take a chair next her, "Do get a little farther, child, can't you?—You know I hate to be crushed and crammed up so."

Here Dr. Crockley, who had already fallen with vehemence upon a cold ham, stopped for a moment, and laughed vehemently. "My dear madam, you are of the slight and elegant order yourself, and you don't make allowance for poor people who are as fat and roundabout as Miss Martha and I—we can't squeeze ourselves into an eggshell, Miss Martha, can we?"

Her slim sisters tittered, and the witty Augustus observed, that, "To be sure, Martha did look more like a collar of Oxford brawn, than any thing else in creation."

Meanwhile the meal proceeded, and little Michael continued to stand half-way between the door and the table, as fixedly as if he had taken root there.

Martha was, in general, very philosophically inclined to let all things round her take their course; but she sat exactly opposite to the object of her father's benevolence, and there was something in the expression of his eye, as it rested upon the dainties before him, that was more than she could bear. "May I give the little boy something to eat, papa?" said she, addressing her father in a timid voice.

"How shall we manage about that, Crockley?" whispered Sir Matthew into the ear of the doctor, who sat close to him.

"Cram him, cram him, Sir Matthew.—You'll find it like oil on the surface of water, spreading far and wide," replied his counsellor, whispering in return. "Let the boy have to boast of his high feeding, and it will do more good than if you were to endow him with lands and houses, and keep him lean."

"Say you so, my wise man? Faith, then, the matter is easy enough, for I believe Dowling Lodge is rather celebrated for its superfluity of good cheer. We'll have him gasping with indigestion within a week, see if we don't." Then, raising his voice, he answered the petition of Martha by repeating her words, "May you give the little boy something to eat?" and then added, with a laugh, "By all manner of means, Miss Martha; and," taking some half-demolished fragments off his own plate, "he may boast of feeding as well as his master. Here, Master Factory, catch!" And so saying, the benevolent owner of Dowling Lodge skilfully cut the air with half a pigeon, which, taking exactly the direction he intended, struck Michael in the middle of his forehead. Whatever might be the effect of this liberality of heart and hand out of doors, Sir Matthew had every reason to be satisfied with the result within. The whole Dowling family, with the

exception of stupid Martha, burst into a simultaneous shout of delight, while Dr. Crockley clapped his hands, and vociferated "Bravo!" as loud as he could scream.

Just at this moment the great bell at the front door, and it was a very great bell, resounded along passage and halls with prodigious clamour. This is a sound which produces, in those who hear it, emotions varying according to their varying temperaments. Genuinely fine, *poco curante* people, if they hear it, heed it not. Fussy folks, of whatever rank or station, prepare their looks and their books, themselves and their belongings, to receive the threatened visitation advantageously; but in a mansion of such professional display as Dowling Lodge, a ring at the door-bell is an event of serious importance. In such an establishment the luxuries, or even the comforts of the family, are confessedly of no importance at all when placed in competition with the display of their grandeur; and, upon the present occasion, the whole family hastened to leave their unfinished repast, in order to receive the welcome spectator of their fine clothes and fine furniture in the drawing-room.

My Lady Dowling, and her two light-coloured elder daughters, Sir Matthew, his eldest

son, and his learned friend, succeeded in reaching their respective sofas and bergères half a minute before the door was thrown open, and Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, Miss Brotherton, Miss Mogg, and Mr. Osmond Norval were announced.

Great, of course, and very zealous was the joy expressed by the Dowling family at the sight of their illustrious friend and her *cortège*. Miss Brotherton was, indeed, of herself, or rather of her purse, a personage pretty sure of being well received everywhere; but even Miss Mogg was (in Yankee phrase) well shaken, and Mr. Osmond Norval gazed at by the young ladies, as an emanation from the rays that encircle the brow of Apollo; while even the exquisite Augustus ventured, in compliment to his titled patroness, to shake him too, though he had never been introduced to him at Oxford.

But the feelings of Sir Matthew, at this prompt re-appearance of his fair and noble friend, were something vastly different from anything his family could participate in, nor did Lady Clarissa mistake them. There was a look that spoke infinitely more than any tongue could utter, and a meaning in the silent pressure of the hand, confirming the idea,

which had often recurred to her during the night, that it would soon be necessary to make Sir Matthew understand the exact nature and extent of the flattering, but perfectly innocent, preference she was conscious of feeling for him.

This first delightful, but somewhat agitating, moment over, Lady Clarissa hastened to explain the purpose of her visit.

“You guess why I am come, do you not, Sir Matthew?” she said, pointing to Mr. Osmond Norval. “Permit me to present to you, and your highly-educated family, this young votary of the Muses, who, if my judgment errs not, may fairly claim competition with the first poets of the age. Nor should we, of this remote neighbourhood, be insensible to the honour of being the first to assist in pluming the yet unfledged wing, which shall one day bear him aloft into the empyrean regions of eternal fame.”

Nothing could be more touching than the manner in which Mr. Osmond Norval pressed his hat between his two hands, and bowed low, low, low, to the noble lady who thus announced him. Sir Matthew, with a stride which, for the vigorous distance it carried him, might have been compared to that of the knave of hearts, approached the young man, and strenuously pressing one of his slender hands in both his

own capacious fists, attested the value he attached to her ladyship's introduction by saying, "Mr. Osmond Norval!—I will not deny that I do occasionally myself offer tribute at the Muses' shrine; and that, being in some sort a brother of the craft, I most unfeignedly rejoice in making the acquaintance of a gentleman so distinguished in it as yourself. But that is not the feeling, sir, which principally leads me to tell you that, from this time forth, I shall hold you as one of my most esteemed friends—you understand me. That lady, sir," pointing to Lady Clarissa, "is a person whose lightest word ought to be law in this neighbourhood,—and to me is so. If you publish any works put Sir Matthew Dowling's name down, sir, for fifty copies: should you find yourself at any time in want of a library, pray remember that there is one of no very small limits at Dowling Lodge; and your reception, sir, in my drawing-room, and at my dinner-table, will ever be such as befits me to bestow on one honoured by the patronage of Lady Clarissa Shrimpton."

Before this speech was quite finished, Lady Dowling, becoming rather fidgety, ventured to mutter something about its being far better to sit down to talk: but Miss Brotherton was

greatly too much amused by what was passing to hear her ; and for Miss Mogg to sit while her patroness stood was quite out of the question : so that Lady Dowling, and the two eldest Miss Dowlings, continued to stand like three finely-dressed flaxen-headed statues, to the end of it.

Sir Matthew then led the high-born lady to a chair, while Miss Brotherton, perceiving that her conversation with the knight was now reduced to a whisper, and that consequently there would be no more fun in listening to it, condescended at last to answer a few of the amiable inquiries after her health which were addressed to her by Mr. Augustus and his two sisters. Meanwhile, the young Norval, with pensive eye intent on nature's beauties, stole his way to the open window, and there having twice or thrice passed his fingers through his long locks, which descended in disordered curls almost to his shoulders, and once and again buttoned and unbuttoned the broad shirt-collar which fell back, unrestrained by that most un-intellectual ligature, a cravat, remained partly, it might be, to let the young ladies look at him, and partly to receive the fragrant breeze of summer upon his brow.

It was now that Dr. Crockley felt he was

called upon to do something that might bring him into notice, and, waddling up to the young poet, he addressed him with an air of incipient friendship, which seemed to say, "And I, too, am somebody."

"You will find this neighbourhood not very prolific, young gentleman, in such gifts of intellect as a poet requires in order to be duly appreciated. Nevertheless, I will not deny that there is amongst us a knot, a little knot, Mr. Norval, whom, upon further acquaintance, you may find not altogether uncongenial. For myself, I may venture to say that I am as warmly devoted to every subject, directly or indirectly connected with the divine, ethereal, immaterial, intellectual part of our composite formation as it is possible for a man to be; and it will give me pleasure, sir, to make your acquaintance." As this was spoken with energy the sultry season made itself felt under the exertion, and Dr. Crockley found it necessary so far to remember the viler portion of his composite formation as to wipe his face and bald head assiduously.

The poet bowed, but not as he had bowed to Lady Clarissa.

Meanwhile, Lady Dowling, her light-coloured daughters, and Miss Mogg, sat pro-

foundly silent upon two chairs and one sofa of the splendid apartment; Miss Brotherton and Mr. Augustus continued to talk about nothing, and Sir Matthew and Lady Clarissa ceased not to mutter, what none but themselves could hear, upon an ottoman, which stood in front of a distant window. If eyebeams could have interrupted a *tête-à-tête*, theirs would not have long continued to proceed undisturbed: for the mistress of Dowling Lodge did certainly cast not a few anxious glances towards the master of it; but it was not for that reason that he at length got up and rather hastily left the room.

While all this was passing in the drawing-room, Martha Dowling and Michael Armstrong remained alone together in the dining-room.

The flying pigeon, impelled by the beneficent Sir Matthew, having hit the forehead of his highly-favoured *protégé* at the very moment that the larum, announcing Lady Clarissa's arrival made itself heard, the greatly amused company left the room before it was possible to ascertain what would become of it.

The child "caught it ere it came to the ground;" but, having done so, held it by one leg with an air of very comical indecision, till Dr. Crockley, who respectfully walked the

last out of the room, shut the door behind him.

The eyes of the factory-boy and the ugly girl then met. "Come to the table, my dear," said Martha; "and if you like that bird eat it—here is a plate and knife and fork for you; but, if you like anything else better, leave it, and tell me what you will have."

Michael opened his magnificent black eyes, and looked earnestly at her. He approached the table, laid down the half-dissected pigeon, but said not a word.

"You would like something else better, would you not?" said Martha, smiling at him.

"I don't know," answered Michael, returning the smile.

"You don't know?—cannot you tell what you should like?"

"No, ma'am, if you please; I don't know what any of it is."

"My dear child, it is all very good, I believe, only you know some people like one thing, and some another. Little boys generally like something very sweet. Here is some cake, what do you say to that?"

"I know what I should like best," said Michael.

"Do you?—then you shall have it, if you will tell me what it is."

"Something good for mother," said the child, blushing violently; "but you must send me, and order me to take it to her, or else it will be stealing it."

"Very well, I will send something to her; but you must eat something yourself first. What shall it be, Michael?" This arrangement seemed to put the boy into a state of perfect ecstasy; he clapped his hands, raised one foot and then the other, with childish glee, and exclaimed, in an accent from which all timidity had fled, "Oh! dear, oh! dear, how nice!"

"What, the cake?—or the grapes?—or what?"

"Taking it to mother! Taking it to mother!" cried Michael.

"Then you love mother very much, Michael?" said Martha, drawing the child towards her, and kissing his smooth dark forehead. Michael nodded his head, and nestled closer to her.

"Well, then, never mind about the cake at present; but I must find a little basket, must I not?—I will give you a basket if you will take care of it and bring it back to me, because

perhaps we may want it again.—There, you may eat that if you are hungry, while I am gone away—I shall be back again in a minute.” So saying she placed some bread and meat before him, and left the room.

Michael had by no means lost his appetite by his morning walk to Hoxley-lane, and being in excellent spirits to boot, he sat down and began to devour what had been set before him with very zealous eagerness.

He had not, however, done one-half of what he was capable of performing, when another door, opposite to the one by which Martha had made her *exit*, opened, and Sir Matthew Dowling walked in.

Michael’s knife and active fingers remained suspended midway between his mouth and the plate; the colour forsook his cheek, and his eye sunk as if unable to meet that of his munificent patron.

“What stuffing still, you greedy little rascal? What have you touched with your nasty factory fingers? Not the grapes, I hope?”

Michael tried to say “No,” but did not succeed in producing the sound; so contented himself by letting the forefinger of his left hand drop into his plate to show how he had been engaged.

“Don’t look so like a fool, you oaf,” said Sir Matthew, taking him by the shoulder, and shaking him with some vivacity. “You are to come along with me, do you hear that? and see a lot of fine folks, and to look up at them too, do you hear that; and by G—d if you blubber, or look grumpish, I’ll have you strapped ten times over, worse than you ever saw done at the factory. Come along!—and mind what I have promised, for I’ll keep it, and worse, that you may rely.”

Michael behaved like a little hero. He remembered the promised basket, and the voice that had told him he should have it; he remembered Hoxley-lane too, and his mother, and Teddy, and their morsel of dry bread; so he walked manfully along beside Sir Matthew, and when they reached the drawing-room door, and his benefactor stretched forth a hand to take his, he yielded it to him, with scarcely any perceptible shudder.

Sir Matthew walked some steps forward, with the boy in his hand, into the drawing-room, and then standing quite still, pointed to the child, and said, “Lady Clarissa! behold the factory-boy!”

Nothing could be more skilful than this form of presentation, for it told Lady Clarissa

every thing, and Lady Dowling nothing. Lady Clarissa sprung from her seat and ran towards the child. "Is it possible!" she exclaimed, with every appearance of violent emotion. "Oh! Sir Matthew!" these last words were audible only to the knight and the little boy; but as the latter could make nothing of them, and the former almost any thing he pleased, it was evident that the lady was as well skilled in saying more than met the ear as the gentleman.

"Indeed, indeed," said Lady Clarissa, drawing forth another of the coroneted handkerchiefs, "indeed, indeed, this is a noble act, Sir Matthew!"

Here her ladyship pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, and remained in the eloquent silence of that position for a moment, then raising herself from the softness that, as she hinted to Sir Matthew, in a whisper, she felt stealing upon her, she called to Mr. Osmond Norval, and said in a tone audible to all present, "Osmond Norval! favoured of Heaven, and the muse! Let not this beautiful subject escape you! Look at this pretty boy—look at the delicate air of aristocratic refinement which pervades his person. Osmond, the earth has not made her daily circuit round

the sun since I beheld this child the very type of sordid wretchedness; would you know the hand that wrought this wondrous change? Would you learn what heart suggested it? Behold them here!" and Lady Clarissa laid her noble fingers on the coat-sleeve of Sir Matthew Dowling.

"Her Ladyship does Sir Matthew Dowling no more than justice, Mr. Norval," said Doctor Crockley, approaching the group. "This is an act that ought to be given to fame, and, if Sir Matthew himself does not object to it, I would suggest its being recorded by your pen, in such a form as may give it general circulation."

The poet pressed his hand upon his heart, and bowed profoundly, and then, raising the other hand to his forehead, he stood for some time silently meditating on the theme thus offered to him. During this interval, the different groups which surrounded him formed a most charming picture. The young man himself stood apart, and unconsciously, perhaps, became the centre to which every eye-beam converged. Lady Clarissa and Sir Matthew, side by side, and, at no great distance from him, awaited his reply; her ladyship with an affectionate smile on her lip, that spoke

at once her confidence in his power and will to do what she required of him. Sir Matthew's expression of countenance could not be read so plainly: it was grave, but it might be doubtful whether its gravity proceeded from displeasure that the answer should be delayed, or solely from the deep interest the subject possessed for him. Lady Dowling, with her hands crossed before her, was seated on a sofa exactly in front of them, with her light eyes rather more widely open than usual, looking straight forward, and her small features seeming to indicate that she was not in the sweetest humour in the world. Dr. Crockley, his hands in his waistcoat pockets, and his short legs rather widely extended, in what dancing-masters term the second position, swayed himself with nice balance to and fro, as if measuring the interval of suspense by seconds vibrated by his person. Miss Arabella Dowling and Miss Harriet Dowling sat close together upon an ottoman, "like to a double cherry," of the Bigarreau kind, with their four eyes so fixed upon the poet that it seemed as if they had but one heart and one soul between them; and on this subject at least, their hearts and souls, if not one, were the same: for they had both, and at the very same instant,

fallen violently in love with Mr. Osmond Norval.

In a deep arm-chair, in which she had almost buried herself, sat, or rather lay, little Miss Brotherton, almost convulsed with laughter, and with her pocket-handkerchief by no means elegantly applied to her mouth (being nearly half of it within it), in the hope of stifling, at least, the sound of her mirth, while Mr. Augustus leant in an attitude of very distinguished elegance on the back of her chair.

A little behind her appeared Miss Mogg, who was in truth neither sitting nor standing, but perched very insecurely on the extreme edge of a couch, which uncomfortable attitude she had chosen from not feeling quite certain whether she ought to stand like Lady Clarissa, or sit like Miss Brotherton. The first she feared was too dignified and distinguished for her; the last too comfortable, and she deserved credit for hitting upon a position so far removed from either; and lastly, very near the door by which he had entered, and to which he had slunk back he knew not how, stood Michael.

This picturesque state of things having lasted quite long enough, Osmond Norval raised his eyes from the ground to the face of

Lady Clarissa, and making a sudden step forwards, dropped on one knee and seized her hand. He attempted to speak, but for some time his voice appeared perfectly choked by emotion. At last, however, he recovered the power of articulation, and said, "Such a subject!—Oh, heaven!—at your bidding too! Best and dearest Lady Clarissa! Can you doubt that all my power and strength will be put in requisition for it? But—may I ask—is it to be published by subscription?"

Without immediately replying to this interesting, and to Mr. Osmond Norval, most important inquiry, Lady Clarissa suddenly clapped her hands together with a sort of vehement enthusiasm that looked very like delirium. Even Sir Matthew, though his intimacy with her had more than once made him the witness to some extraordinary freaks, looked at her with astonishment; Lady Dowling's eyes were more widely opened than ever; Miss Mogg instinctively thrust her hand into her bag in search of a smelling-bottle; and Miss Brotherton took her handkerchief out of her mouth, and looked grave.

"I have got it! Oh, I have got it!" she exclaimed. "What a delicious idea!—Let us sit down! Mogg, push forward that couch,

child.—Poor girl! She really is almost too fat to move. Gracious heaven, Sir Matthew! what would become of my etherealized spirit if it were so encumbered? But sit down,—sit down, all of you.—Norval, place yourself on that tabouret.—Mary Brotherton, draw near and listen.—And all the rest of you give ear to what I am going to say, and answer the questions I shall ask with freedom and sincerity.”

Thus conjured, every one in the room, except Lady Dowling, who stirred not an inch, drew round the place where Lady Clarissa had seated herself, and prepared with considerable curiosity to hear what she was going to say.

“Is not amusement the very soul of life?” she began.

“No doubt of it, my lady,” from the lips of Dr. Crockley, was the most articulate of the many acquiescent answers which followed.

“Is not a country neighbourhood fearfully, lamentably deficient in this?” pursued the animated inquirer.

“There cannot be two opinions on that point,” replied Sir Matthew, with authority.

“And is it not the duty of neighbours, residing within reach of each other as we do, to exert every facility with which nature has

endowed them, in order as much as possible to soften to each other the privations to which their distance from the metropolis obliges them to submit?"

In reply to this demand, there was a perfect clamour of approbation. "Well, then," continued Lady Clarissa, "if such be your feelings, I am certain of success in the project that has come, like a spirit of light borne upon silver wings to visit my dull spirit. This noble act of Sir Matthew's must not pass away like an ordinary deed that is hardly performed, ere it be forgotten. No! it shall live in story—it shall live in song—it shall live again in action! Norval, dear gifted friend, did you ever write a drama?"

"Occasionally a scene or two, Lady Clarissa."

"That is enough, dear Osmond. I ask not a hackneyed worn-out pen. I will relate to him, Sir Matthew, this interesting anecdote exactly as it occurred—he shall dramatize it—perhaps introduce an episode, or underplot, to increase the business of the scene—we will all act it," and here Lady Clarissa gracefully bowed to the whole party, "and all the neighbourhood shall be assembled to enjoy the fête. What say you to this, Sir Matthew?"

"Upon my word, my lady, I think it is one

of the cleverest and most agreeable ideas that ever entered a lady's head. If you and Mr. Norval will arrange the drama, Lady Clarissa, I will take care to have one of the rooms fitted up as a theatre, and depend upon it we shall be in no want of actors. Upon my word, I never liked any idea so much in my life."

"Will it not be pleasant, Mary Brotherton?" said Lady Clarissa, in her most caressing tone to the heiress.

"Very pleasant, indeed," replied the young lady. "I should ask no better fun."

"And what does my Lady Dowling say?" resumed Lady Clarissa, with that stiffness of manner with which her ladyship now and then refreshed the memory of her plebeian friends, as to the difference of rank between them.

"Oh! dear me, I am sure I don't know," replied Lady Dowling, looking frightened.

"Well! we must not torment Lady Dowling by forcing her to act, Sir Matthew. There cannot be a doubt that we shall have volunteers in abundance. You will act, Mary Brotherton, will you not?"

"Act?—Most assuredly I will act, Lady Clarissa," replied the heiress. "People as much at liberty to please themselves as I am, seldom refuse to aid and abet a scheme so ex-

ceedingly full of amusement as this seems to be."

"We will set such an example," cried Dr. Crockley, rubbing his hands joyously, "that every county in England shall hear of us with envy—I know what Sir Matthew can make of a thing if he takes to it. Leave him alone for giving the go-by to all the world. Write away, young gentleman, write away; depend upon it you'll have a theatre, and actors too, that will do you justice."

At this interesting moment, just as the fair-haired Miss Dowlings began to whisper to each other something about characters and dresses, and Mr. Augustus to whisper to Miss Brotherton his hope that he should have to act a great deal with her, the great bell sent forth another peal, upon which Lady Clarissa held up her finger in token of silence; and before the new visiter entered, all the bright sallies of the party were as effectually extinguished as if they had been supplied by gas, which was suddenly turned off.

CHAPTER VII.

A popular Character—More Benevolence—Interesting Intelligence received with becoming Animation—A select Committee—A Farewell full of meaning.

THE person who produced this very powerful effect was a lady not particularly distinguished either by wealth or station ; but she seemed to possess the faculty of finding her way into every house within her reach, whether the owner of it desired her presence or not.

Mrs. Gabberly was the widow of a clergyman, who had formerly been vicar of the parish of St. Mary's, Ashleigh, and having made herself the very largest acquaintance that ever was enjoyed by any country lady without a carriage, she determined upon continuing amongst them after her husband died, as it might have taken her, she said, more years than she was likely to live, before she could expect to make so many friends all over again. She, therefore,

on leaving the vicarage, contented herself with a very small house, as near the town as possible, and went on very much as she had done before, only having one maid-servant instead of two, and contenting herself with a donkey-chair and a very little boy to drive it, instead of a one-horse chaise, and a steady man-servant of all work.

Considering the wealth and splendour of the neighbourhood in which accident had first placed her, and to which choice now held her bound, it may be looked upon as a matter of wonder that she should have made any intimacies at all. But, though the vicarage of St. Mary's, Ashleigh, was far enough from being richly endowed, and the private fortune of the late incumbent not such as to enable him to approach to any thing like an equality in his style of living to even the least wealthy among the manufacturers in the district, there is still a species of respect for the profession of a clergyman, which opens to him and his family the houses of many greatly their superiors in point of wealth ; and it therefore pretty generally depends on the clergy themselves, whether they are on intimate terms with their neighbours, or not.

Now Mr. Gabberly, or more properly speak-

ing, Mrs. Gabberly, who in strength of will had ever been his far better half, did greatly desire to be on intimate terms with her neighbours. Rich or poor, gentle or simple, old or young, she was determined to be intimate with them all. And she was intimate with them all, very intimate. One word more, and Mrs. Gabberly shall be left to speak for herself, which she is certainly able to do, with as little impediment of any kind, as most people. Mrs. Gabberly was the daughter of a physician; and from her earliest years had acquired so decided a taste for the theory and practice of medicine, that she could never wean herself entirely from it, but was thought by many to let it still occupy rather too large a share of her conversation and thoughts. Nevertheless, Mrs. Gabberly was exceedingly popular, for though her discourse ran much upon bruises and bowels, rickets and rheums, spasms and spines, it ran also upon matters more attractive. If she could not tell what everybody for three miles round had for dinner on the very day on which she was speaking, it was a hundred to one but she could tell, within a cutlet or a hash, what they had been all eating for a week before. She knew, with an approach to correctness that was perfectly astonishing, the amount of every body's expen-

diture, and every body's debts; could tell to the fraction of a new ribbon, how many bonnets each lady consumed per annum; and was perfectly *au fait* of the quantity of corn and hay got through in every body's stables. No flirtation ever escaped either her eyes or her tongue, and the Morning Post was a less faithful record of fine parties, than the tablets of her comprehensive memory.

The Dowling family was aware of all this; and each in their way had a peculiar value for her society, for Mrs. Gabberly knew how to be all things to all men, women, and children: but, at the present moment, it was Sir Matthew who felt the most decided movement of satisfaction at beholding her sharp black eyes, brisk step, and eager manner of reconnoitring every individual present, as she entered the room.

"Here is my general advertiser," thought the knight, as he extended his huge hand to welcome her. "We will have a theatrical representation that shall immortalize my charity, and here's the one that shall act the part of Fame, and trumpet it round the country."

"My goodness! what a charming party of you is got all together this morning!" exclaimed Mrs.

Gabberly, smiling and bowing, and nodding, and courtesying to every body in succession, all the time that Sir Matthew continued his cordial hand-shaking. "Now you must just tell me what you are all about, for if you don't I shall die, and there's the truth."

"No, no, Mrs. Gabberly, you shan't die, if we can save your life," replied Sir Matthew, in his most jovial tone. "We are a gay and happy party at this moment, I do believe, one and all;" and here the knight thought proper to send a glance after little Michael, who, notwithstanding his fine clothes, was looking pale and sad enough, in the most distant corner from the principal group to which he had been able to creep.

The experienced eye of Sir Matthew read past suffering and present terror in his speaking features, and he cursed the trembling child in his heart of hearts. But Sir Matthew Dowling might have removed as many coatings as the grave-digger in Hamlet, ere the looker-on could have penetrated so far; and it must have been a quick observer that could have detected the sort of lurid glare that for half an instant gleamed in the savage look he cast upon the boy. It was for no longer space that

his joyous gaiety was obscured, and he then turned again his admiring glances upon the Lady Clarissa, and resumed his speech.

"This is the person, Mrs. Gabberly, who must let you into the mystery. You must entreat her ladyship to be pleased to inform you what it is she is going to make us all do."

"Well, then, I hope her ladyship won't refuse. You won't be so cruel, will you, my lady?"

"No, certainly!" replied Lady Clarissa, smiling complacently on the knight. "If Sir Matthew complies with my proposal, I shall have no objection to its being proclaimed to all the world."

And here glances were exchanged between the knight and the lady, perfectly intelligible to each other, and which said very distinctly, "Ah! Lady Clarissa!" on the one part; and, "Oh! Sir Matthew!" on the other.

"Speak then, my lady!" said the gallant manufacturer with a low bow; "and whatever you shall say shall be law."

"Now then, ladies and gentlemen! all of you give ear; for not Mrs. Gabberly alone, but every one present, should pay attention to what I am about to say." And here Lady Clarissa turned her eyes round about her in

search of the hero of the scene. "Where is the little boy?" said she, in a tone of great theatrical feeling.

"Come here, my dear little fellow!" said Sir Matthew, again turning his glances towards Michael, and now looking amiable and benignant with all his might. But the child seemed to wither beneath this sunshine, even more conspicuously than when he had been left in the shade; and it was not till the knight made some gigantic strides forwards to meet him, that poor Michael formed the desperate courage necessary to bring him from his corner to the spot where his noble benefactress stood. Nay, the last steps were not made without the helping hand of Sir Matthew, which heavily laid upon his shoulder performed a twofold office; ostensibly caressing, while, in truth, it forcibly impelled the little trembler forward.

"Now then, Mrs. Gabberly," said Lady Clarissa, "look at this interesting little fellow! It is he who is the hero of our *fête*."

"Indeed! And pray what may the young gentleman's name be?" said Mrs. Gabberly.

"Is not that delicious?" cried Lady Clarissa. "Oh, Sir Matthew! how I envy you your feelings! Note that, dear Norval. The touch is exquisitely dramatic, and must on no account

be omitted. This *young gentleman*, Mrs. Gabberly," continued Lady Clarissa, with increasing animation, "this young gentleman, as you most naturally call him, was, a few short hours ago, a wretched, ragged beggar-boy! Sir Matthew Dowling, from motives, that I dare not wound his generous heart by thus publicly dwelling upon, has rescued him from poverty and destruction. This deed, so beautiful in itself, and so beneficial in its influence as an example, is about to be immortalized as it ought to be, by the pen, the rapid, brilliant, touching pen of my young friend, Mr. Osmond Norval. He has undertaken to dramatize this charming trait of benevolence, and our excellent Sir Matthew has consented to fit up a little theatre for the representation of it, at which all the neighbourhood are to be present as invited guests."

"Well now! If ever I heard any thing so delightful as that!" exclaimed Mrs. Gabberly, clapping her hands in ecstasy. "Are the cards sent out, Sir Matthew?"

"Not yet, Mrs. Gabberly," replied the knight, with his most friendly smile; "but depend upon it that when they are, you will not be forgotten."

"Well now, my dear Lady Dowling! I am

sure you are always so kind to me!" cried the delighted Mrs. Gabberly, making her way towards the sofa, where sat the lady of the mansion in frowning state: "I should not wonder if you were to contrive a bed for me on this great occasion, it would be just like you. And oh my! I have got such a quantity of things I want to tell you, but I can't stop one instant longer now, if you'd give me the whole world. So, good bye to you all, my dears! I've heard something about you, Miss Arabella, but it must keep, my dear; and I've a secret for Miss Harriet's ear, too, when we have got leisure. But, good bye, good bye! Good morning, my Lady Clarissa!" And away bustled Sir Matthew's *public advertiser* to spread the glorious news of private theatricals at Dowling Lodge throughout the country. She paused for one moment, however, as she passed by Michael; and putting her hand upon his head, so as to make him turn his face up towards her, she said, after looking at him very earnestly,—

"Well now, for a beggar child, he is to be sure the genteelest-looking little fellow I ever did see; but, perhaps, that may be owing to his being so pale and thin, which is certainly a great deal more elegant than fatness and red cheeks, though it don't quite seem so healthy."

"Oh! he is in perfect health, I do assure you, Mrs. Gabberly, as you would have said, if you had seen the dear little fellow eating his luncheon with us just now," said the amiable Sir Matthew chucking him under the chin. "But, by the way," continued the merry knight, "I rather suspect that I called him away before he had quite finished, and that's what it is makes him look so doleful, isn't it, dear? Well! never be ashamed about it—go back again, there's a darling! and don't forget to take a nice bit home to mother and brother—d'ye hear, Michael? Pretty fellow! how he blushes!"

And here the benevolent Sir Matthew himself opened the door leading to the dining-room, and playfully pushed the "darling" through it.

"Well now!" again exclaimed the astonished Mrs. Gabberly, "did ever any body see such a beautiful spectacle of charity as that!"

And without waiting for any reply, the brisk little lady made her exit without further pause or delay of any kind, and so completely charged "to the top of her bent" with wonderful intelligence, that she actually suffered from the repletion till half a dozen gossipings had relieved it.

Meanwhile, the party she left resolved themselves into a committee of management upon the business in hand. Mr. Osmond Norval was entreated to urge his eloquent pen with the greatest possible rapidity; while on his part, Sir Matthew promised that the necessary workmen should immediately be employed in preparing one of the largest rooms in the house as a theatre.

When the consultation reached this point, Lady Dowling suddenly rose and left the room; but this circumstance did not appear to produce much emotion in any of the party, and they remained together in a most delightful state of hubbub and excitement till the heiress grew tired, and ventured to hint that she thought it would be best for her to drive home first, and then send her carriage back for the accommodation of her noble friend.

This proposal brought the meeting to a conclusion; but not till Lady Clarissa had confessed in a whisper to Sir Matthew, that she never, in her whole life, remembered to have taken any thing that did her so much good as the delicious grapes he had sent home with her the evening before.

CHAPTER VIII.

A very innocent tête-à-tête, but in which Miss Martha Dowling comes to a wrong conclusion—An unfortunate embassy—An agreeable excursion—A philosophical disquisition—A visit to the Factory.

WHILE these things were going on in my Lady Dowling's morning drawing-room, the forgotten Martha—forgotten at least by all but little Michael—employed herself in seeking such a basket, as might answer the purpose of a viaticum between the object of her father's charity, and the mother and brother of whom he had so fondly spoken. Having at length succeeded in her quest, she returned to the dining-room, and was almost as much disappointed at finding the object of her good-natured exertions flown, as the poor child himself had been, when obliged to quit the room to which this kind friend had promised to return. But Martha, though not a person very highly favoured by circumstances, was nevertheless better off than Michael, inasmuch

as, by keeping out of sight, she could pretty generally contrive to remain where she chose, and do what she liked. These enviable privileges enabled her now to sit down at one of the large open windows of the dining-room, and to draw from her unseemly-sized pocket a volume of Shakspeare, with which she determined to beguile the time till the boy should return, or till, by some means or other, she might be able to discover what had become of him.

When, therefore, impelled by the playful but very effectual impulse of Sir Matthew's shove, Michael once more entered the dining-parlour, he had the satisfaction of being again greeted by the friendly eye, and friendly voice, which had already so greatly cheered him.

"So, here you are again, my little man," said Martha, repocketing her book, and rising; "I thought you would hardly forget the basket: see, here it is, and now you shall help me pack it."

The help thus asked for, was afforded by the happy child's holding the basket in his hand, as he followed her round the table while with a smile that spoke as much pleasure as his own, she selected all sorts of good things to put into it.

“ There now ! Now I don’t think we can put in any more, Michael ; so set off and carry it to your mother.”

With eyes beaming rapture, and little hands that trembled with delight, Michael closed the lid of the basket, and proceeded towards the door ; but ere he had fully reached it, he stopped short, and addressing Martha, in a tone as fearless and confidential as if she had been his sister, he said,

“ But what d’ye think about Teddy ? Mightn’t I change into my old clothes again, and just step into the factory for one minute ? Teddy can’t almost never eat the dinner as we takes to the factory, and a bit of this would do him so much good !—May I ?”

“ Upon my word, Michael, I am rather puzzled what to say,” replied his friend ; “ as papa has ordered you to have these clothes, he might not be pleased at your taking them off again, and it would be a great pity to make him angry with you when he is so very good and kind, wouldn’t it ?”

Michael hung his head, and said nothing.

“ But why need you change your clothes, my dear boy ?—I dare say Teddy would be very proud to see you look so nice.”

Still Michael answered not, but began as-

siduously picking to pieces the handle of Martha's delicate basket.

"Don't do that, dear," said Martha approaching, and taking the offending hand in hers; "but tell me what you are thinking about?"

"I am thinking," said Michael, "that if I walked into the midst of 'em this way, and up to poor Teddy, in his dirty ragged clothes, it would look"—and here he stopped without finishing the sentence.

"It would look, how?—as if you were proud, perhaps?" said Martha,

The child shook his head.

"No, not that. Teddy would not think that," he replied.

"What would he think, then?—Tell me all that is passing in your little head, and then I shall be able to advise you."

"Why, he'd think," said Michael, and tears started as he spoke—"he'd think that he and I could never be right down brothers any more."

Martha involuntarily kissed the little face that was turned up to her's, but replied laughingly,

"Oh! that's foolish, Michael; do you think that a fine jacket could separate two little brothers that love each other?—I think I could

love you quite as well in a shabby coat, as in a fine one."

Michael looked at her very earnestly for a minute or two, and then said almost in a whisper, "Is Sir Matthew Dowling, as owns our factory, your father?"

"Yes, Michael," replied Martha, colouring from some painful feeling which the expression of the boy's speaking features had given rise to. The child coloured too, but said with good courage,—

"Please, ma'am, I should love Teddy just as well, and Teddy would love me, only the others may be would mock at him, and me too—and I know Teddy could not bear it."

"Then they would not be as good children as I think you are. But tell me, Michael, something about the mill: papa has never let us see it yet, but I believe it is only because mamma thinks it is a dirty place. Is it very dirty, Michael?"

"Yes, please, ma'am."

"And what makes it so, my dear? The cotton that goes into it looks as white as snow. I never can get any body to tell me anything about a mill, but I think it must be very curious—and I want to know, Michael, what good such very little creatures as you can do

there ; yet I have heard papa say, that he pays a vast quantity of money to quite little children, and that's the reason, he says, that the factories are such a blessing to the country. You get wages, don't you, my little fellow ?"

" Yes, ma'am ; I gets two shilling a week, and Teddy eighteen-pence, 'cause he's weaker."

" That is not much, to be sure ; but it's better than nothing, isn't it ?

" Yes, ma'am."

" Do the children in general like it ?"

" Like what, ma'am ?"

" Working in the factory, my dear, and getting money for their poor parents."

" The children likes to have the wages," replied Michael.

" But perhaps they do not like to do any work for them, Michael?" said Martha, laughing. " That's what papa says. But it is not right, my dear, for little boys and girls to be always at play, you know. Don't you think, Michael, that it is proper for poor people's children to do something to help themselves if they can ?"

" Yes, ma'am," said Michael, but in so low a tone, that it was as much as Martha could do to hear it ; and so melancholy a look accompanied the words, that she could not help

thinking there was a great deal of truth in what she had constantly heard repeated by most of her father's friends and neighbours, as well as himself—namely, that the factory children were a race of very idle, ungrateful little creatures ; spoilt by the high wages and indulgence they received, and quite unconscious of the inestimable advantages they possessed over all the other children in the British dominions.

But, nevertheless, though this disagreeable conviction pressed very painfully upon her, Martha could not help feeling very kindly disposed towards little Michael ; and upon his presently saying, “ Shall I go to mother and Teddy, if you please, ma'am ? ” she almost forgot all the naughtiness she attributed to him and his fraternity, and only remembering the disadvantage that any obedience to her father's wishes might bring upon him, said, “ Wait one moment, Michael, and I will find papa, and ask if you may change your dress, in order to visit your brother in the factory.”

So saying, she left the room, and having ascertained that the visitors were gone, ventured to seek her father in the drawing-room ; where she found him in deep consultation with Dr. Crockley, his two eldest daughters, and his son, as to the possibility of converting the

school-room into a theatre: all being of opinion that the great drawing-room must be reserved for the ball, and the dining-room for the supper, which it was agreed, on all sides, must follow the representation.

"May I speak to you, papa?" said Martha, timidly, on perceiving that the whole party were exceedingly earnest upon some theme or other.

"Oh! goodness, Martha, don't come to plague us now!" exclaimed Arabella.

"It is very odd, but Martha always does come in the way of every thing," said Harriet.

"I wish you were married or buried, child?" cried the lively Augustus; "for you make a monstrous bad hand at playing the young lady of fashion. Upon my life you grow fatter every day. Doesn't she, doctor? I wish you would dose her a little."

"That Miss Martha is a little opaque, I will not deny," replied Dr. Crockley, familiarly coming behind her, and measuring the expanse of her waist with his two hands.

"May I speak to you, papa?" repeated the patient Martha, quietly retreating from the jocose hands of Dr. Crockley, but apparently quite insensible to all the other attacks.

"What do you want to say, Martha?" demanded Sir Matthew.

Thus much encouraged, she drew near and whispered to him, "The little boy that you have taken in, papa, wants to know if he may put on his old clothes again, and go to speak to his brother in the factory?"

"Do you hear this, doctor?" exclaimed Sir Matthew; "the boy wants to go back to the factory again. Isn't that an answer to all the trash that people have been trying to get up about their being over-worked? It is just like 'em—that's the very model of a factory child—do what you will, you can never content 'em."

"The chap wants to get back to the factory?" said Dr. Crockley, addressing himself to Martha, with an accent that indicated surprise. "That's curious enough, any how."

"No, sir, I do not believe he wants to do any more than speak to his brother, who is at work there—he wanted to take him something that was left at luncheon, papa."

"And to show off his own good living to the factory? That's it, I suspect doctor; one can understand that—and what do you say to it? I should have no objection, I think; what's your opinion? Only I don't see the fun of his going in his old rags, if he went as you saw

him just now, it would make some fun, wouldn't it?"

"Capital, by Jove!" replied the doctor. "How quick you are, Sir Matthew! you seize every thing in a moment. What do you say to our going along with him? Mightn't we catch a hint or two, as to how things are going on?"

"If I'm quick, Crockley, upon my soul you are not slow," replied the knight. "You've got your horse here, of course? The doctor nodded assent. "Then I will order mine, and we'll ride down to the mill together. So get along, Martha, and tell the boy that I will take him to the factory with me, but that he is not to change his clothes."

Martha felt quite aware that she had not executed her commission successfully. But there was no help for it, and therefore with the best grace she could, she told her little client the result of it.

The whole aspect of the boy changed as he heard it, and, as if instinctively, he placed the precious basket, that till now he had continued to hold firmly in his hand, upon a table near him.

"But take your basket, Michael," said the kind-hearted Martha, in a voice that was in-

tended to cheer him ; “ I am sure papa won’t be angry at your doing that, for I told him about it.”

“ No, please, ma’am, I’d rather not,” said Michael.

“ Well, then, go into the hall by that door, and wait till Sir Matthew comes through. Perhaps he will speak to you about it, and at any rate you had better carry it as far as that.”

The child obeyed her, and taking up again the treasure he no longer valued, passed out into the hall : but before Sir Matthew and his friend entered it, Michael had put the worthless basket out of sight.

Hardly had he done so, when he heard the coarse laugh of Sir Matthew, and the respondent titter of the doctor approaching. The little fellow started, and jumped aside, in order to place himself out of their way ; but the knight, striding to the place where he stood, seized him by the shoulder with his hand, while with a vigorous action of his enormous foot he sent him forward towards the house-door. This feat which was performed with considerable dexterity, met its reward, in the shout of laughter with which Dr. Crockley welcomed it. “ By Jove, Sir Matthew ! ” he exclaimed, as soon as he had recovered his

breath ; “ there is nothing like you on the face of God’s earth.—It is a confounded monopoly though, let me tell you. No man has a right to be the deepest reasoner, the best jester, and the most finished man of taste of his age. It’s monstrous, Sir knight, and a conspiracy against you would be a very honest plot.”

And as he spoke, he held his sides, as if still suffering from the effects of his excessive merriment.

A servant who followed the facetious pair now opened the door, and on the broad esplanade of gravel before it a couple of grooms were holding the gentlemen’s horses. As soon as they were seated in their saddles, with a mounted attendant behind them, the great manufacturer turned round his head to seek the object of his charity. Michael stood doubting and trembling on the lowest step of the portico, while a faint hope fluttered at his heart, that the grand gentleman would ride away and forget him ; but it was quickly chased by the voice of Sir Matthew, who, bringing his horse’s head so close upon the child, as to touch him, while he seemed almost to shrink into the pillar by which he stood to escape it, said in a voice, the jeering tone of which again almost convulsed Dr. Crockley with laughter,

"Pray, young gentleman, may you happen to know the way to Brookford factory?"

The boy looked out upon the wide-spreading park; and though, despite the carefully-chosen position of the mansion, many towering grim-looking chimney cones were seen to rise amidst their own lurid smoke in the distance (for in that direction lay the town of Ashleigh), he could catch no glimpse of the hated walls that for years past had formed his daily prison-house. He, therefore, answered, but not very audibly, "No, sir, if you please."

"Speak up, my hero!" vociferated Sir Matthew, advancing upon him,— "Yes or no?"

"No;" replied the boy, distinctly.

"Then be pleased to have the kindness to do me the favour of following my horse, and I will have the honour of showing you the way."

So saying, Sir Matthew gave a merry look of intelligence to his friend, and they set off together at a brisk trot.

Michael, for a piecer,* was a tall child for his age; and though his limbs were wretchedly thin and attenuated, they had sufficient elasti-

* The children whose duty it is to walk backwards and forwards before the reels, on which the cotton, silk, or worsted is wound, for the purpose of joining the threads when they break, are called piecers, or pieceners.

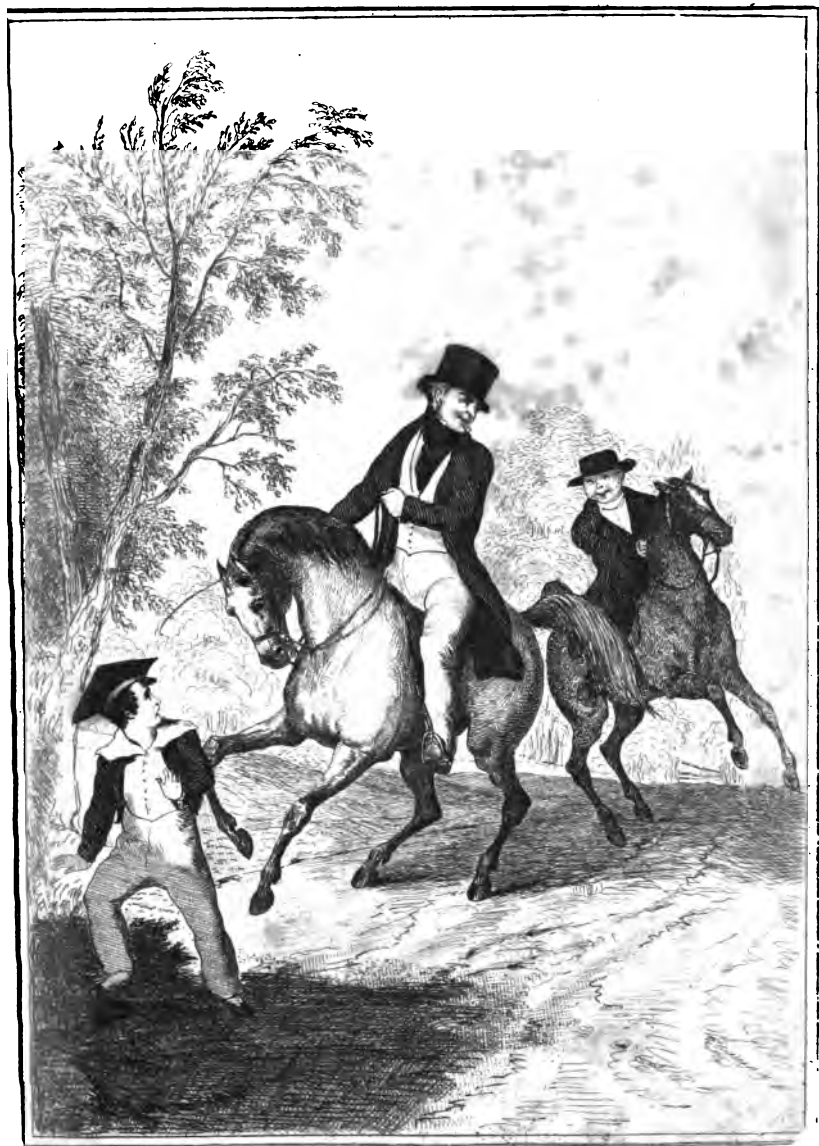
city to enable him for some time to keep at no great distance, though it was a constantly increasing one, from the two gentlemen; but by degrees, his breath and strength failed, and perforce his speed relaxed into a panting, shuffling walk.

Sir Matthew, who from time to time turned round a laughing face to look at him, now reined his horse and awaited his approach; upon which Michael redoubled his efforts, and in a few minutes stood beside his benefactor.

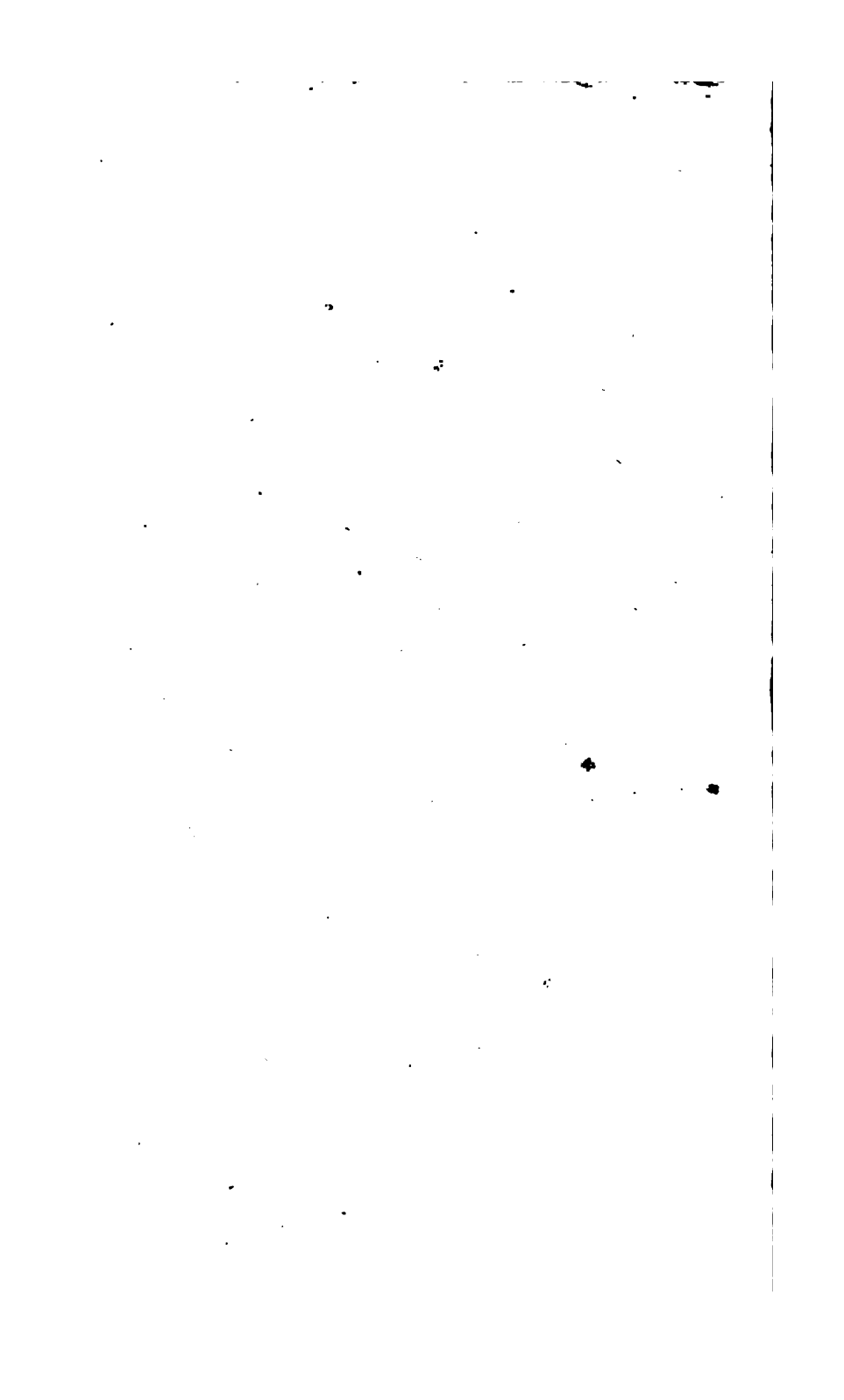
"Step on, young gentleman; step a little quicker, if you please; or perhaps, I may find a way to mend your pace; I am not very fond of such lazy company." And, suiting his action to his words, he gave the quivering child several sharp cuts across the shoulders with his riding-whip.

"He trots out in style now, doesn't he, doctor?" said Sir Matthew gaily, making his well-bitted horse cross and recross the road in such a manner, that, at each manœuvre, the goaded child fancied himself already trampled beneath his feet. "Don't you think I should make a good dancing-master, Crockley?"

"Capital, by Jove!—Egad, the youngster has learned some vastly pretty steps already. By the way, Sir Matthew," continued the phi-



*Don't you think, I should make
a good dancing Master?*



losophical physician, "when one watches that pale-faced young scamp making such active caprioles for no reason on the earth, but because he hears your pretty gentle jennet snuffing at his shoulder,—when one watches that, it is impossible not to see that nothing in God's world but sheer wilful laziness makes those obstinate little brutes, at the factory, pretend to totter, and stumble, and faint, and the devil knows what; when all their work is to walk backwards and forwards as leisurely as if they were parading for pleasure. Nothing shall ever make me believe but that all the grunting and grumbling we hear about overworked children proceeds from a regular conspiracy among the worst of the parents. And, upon my soul, if you yield to it, you'll soon have to look after the wheels yourself."

"Get on with ye, to the lodge there, you lazy cur," said the knight, addressing his panting protégé, "and wait till we come up." Then reining up his horse, Sir Matthew drew close to his highly-valued intellectual companion, and falling into a gentle foot-pace, continued the scientific discussion with deep interest, and a wonderful clearness of perception.

"It is quite curious to me, Crockley," he

he said, "to observe how common sense and observation will often make a man of tolerable ability hit upon the very same facts, and come exactly to the very same conclusions as the man of science, who has passed his whole life in study. What you have mentioned now is precisely what has occurred to me over and over again, a thousand times, I am sure, at the very least, since I have been working Brookford factory. For just watch, my dear Crockley, any little village vagabond that you may chance to see as you ride about the country—just watch him at play; and tell me where you'll find a grown man that can keep moving as he does?"

"Nowhere, Sir Matthew, nowhere upon the face of the earth; and, it stands to reason, in spite of all that the confounded canters can say to the contrary, that nature made them so on purpose. Why, what's steam?—Let them answer me that. Is steam man's making? Isn't it sent by Providence? And, what for, I should like to know? Isn't it for the good of mankind? And how is that good to be had, if the nimbleness of children is not brought to bear upon it? It is neither more nor less than a most shocking impiety, Sir Matthew; and upon my soul, if I were you, I would build a

meeting-house of my own, and hire a preacher too, at a pretty good salary, to preach against it. But no Church of England parson, remember; because if they don't preach the doctrine you like, you would have no power to turn 'em out."

" You're right, Crockley. That's a devilish good idea; I'll turn it over in my head, and I shall like to hear some more of your notions about it. By the way, Crockley, you must not think of going home to dinner to-day. We'll have a cool bottle of claret, and talk the matter comfortably over. And there's another thing, too, I want to speak to you about. There's a devilish deal of talk about the health of the factory brats; and I have a notion of appointing a regular medical practitioner upon my establishment, who might always be ready, if called upon, to answer any questions that might be asked. Now I hear you are a man, Crockley, capable of obliging a friend that deserves it; and if it's agreeable to you, instead of looking in now and then to give us an opinion as you do now, you shall have a regular appointment, with a couple of hundred a year, just to look after the health of the children."

" I should like such an arrangement ex-

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"Nowhere, Sir Matthew, nowhere upon the face of the earth; and, it stands to reason, in spite of all that the confounded canters can say to the contrary, that nature made them so on purpose. Why, what's steam?—Let them answer me that. Is steam man's making? Isn't it sent by Providence? And, what for, I should like to know? Isn't it for the good of mankind? And how is that good to be had, if the nimbleness of children is not brought to bear upon it? It is neither more nor less than a most shocking impiety, Sir Matthew; and upon my soul, if I were you, I would build a

meeting-house of my own, and hire a preacher too, at a pretty good salary, to preach against it. But no Church of England parson, remember; because if they don't preach the doctrine you like, you would have no power to turn 'em out."

"You're right, Crockley. That's a devilish good idea; I'll turn it over in my head, and I shall like to hear some more of your notions about it. By the way, Crockley, you must not think of going home to dinner to-day. We'll have a cool bottle of claret, and talk the matter comfortably over. And there's another thing, too, I want to speak to you about. There's a devilish deal of talk about the health of the factory brats; and I have a notion of appointing a regular medical practitioner upon my establishment, who might always be ready, if called upon, to answer any questions that might be asked. Now I hear you are a man, Crockley, capable of obliging a friend that deserves it; and if it's agreeable to you, instead of looking in now and then to give us an opinion as you do now, you shall have a regular appointment, with a couple of hundred a year, just to look after the health of the children."

"I should like such an arrangement ex-

ceedingly well, Sir Matthew. You know my love of science; and this would give me a capital opportunity for speculating upon different constitutions. Egad, Sir Matthew, I should like to write a book upon the subject. I think a monstrous deal of good might be done that way."

"No doubt about it, Crockley: a clever fellow, like you, may throw an amazing deal of light upon a subject that is really becoming exceedingly important; especially when one recollects that the national wealth and prosperity depends upon it altogether. You must come and dine with me often, Crockley, without any ceremony; and we may be able to hit out many a good thing over the bottle."

The two gentlemen now reached the lodge-gates, where little Michael stood waiting for them; and as the high-road soon turned in such a direction as to make Brookford factory visible, he was ordered to run on, and wait at the gates without minding them. They accordingly proceeded in their conversation without interruption; and in the course of it some very excellent hints were thrown out relative to the manufacturing interests in general, and to that of Brookford factory in particular.

Having reached the gates of what was generally termed his "magnificent establishment," and waited till the stylish groom in attendance upon him came up, Sir Matthew, and his estimable friend, left their horses with him, and entered the court, which, protected by a very lofty wall, surrounded the buildings on all sides.

Those persons who have, once in their lives, seen a large cotton-factory need no description of it; for it has features which, once looked upon, can never be forgotten; but, for the information of those who have not, a slight sketch of Sir Matthew Dowling's establishment shall be given.

It consisted of very extensive buildings constructed in the centre of the enclosed court, and forming three sides of a vast square; the fourth being open on the side fronting the principal gates of entrance. When it is stated that the edifice consisted of six stories, and that each side of it presented six lines of windows, containing forty windows in each line, some idea of its magnitude may be conceived.

Michael was already at the gates, and, on the approach of Sir Matthew, rang the bell; a ceremony necessary to obtain admittance both for masters and labourers, no means of en-

trance or exit being ever left unsecured for a single instant.

The summons was answered by a lame boy, stationed within to perform the office of porter. He bent low before the great man, and low too before his jeering friend; though the jocose visits of the latter to the factory were dreaded as much as the lash itself.

Neither the one nor the other seemed to see him, but passed on. Then followed poor little Michael, hating most cordially the bravery of the attire, which made him expect to meet the ridicule, rather than the sympathy, of his late companions.

On seeing a young stranger, the lame porter looked up: but from him, at least, Michael had nothing to fear; for the boy's languid eye surveyed his altered person, without the slightest suspicion of ever having seen it before. Sir Matthew, like most others of his craft, was not in the habit of indulging his family by exhibiting to them the secret arcana of that hideous mystery by which the delicate forms of young children are made to mix and mingle with the machinery; from whence flows the manufacturer's wealth, this divine portion of the vast engine being considered, however, as a very inferior, though necessary, part of it.

But, although they had never honoured the premises with a visit, it was, of course, well known to all that Sir Matthew Dowling was the father of a numerous progeny; and Michael passed on amidst such blessings as human nature, under such circumstances, was likely to bestow on one of them.

The party entered the building, whence—as all know who have done the like—every sight, every sound, every scent that kind nature has fitted to the organs of her children, so as to render the mere unfettered use of them a delight, are banished for ever and for ever. The ceaseless whirring of a million hissing wheels seizes on the tortured ear; and while threatening to destroy the delicate sense, seems bent on proving first, with a sort of mocking mercy, of how much suffering it can be the cause. The scents that reek around, from oil, tainted water, and human filth, with that last worst nausea, arising from the hot refuse of atmospheric air, left by some hundred pairs of labouring lungs, render the act of breathing a process of difficulty, disgust, and pain. All this is terrible. But what the eye brings home to the heart of those, who look round upon the horrid earthly hell, is enough to make it all forgotten; for who can think of villanous smells, or heed the

suffering of the ear-racking sounds, while they look upon hundreds of helpless children, divested of every trace of health, of joyousness, and even of youth! Assuredly there is no exaggeration in this; for except only in their diminutive size, these suffering infants have no trace of it. Lean and distorted limbs—sallow and sunken cheeks—dim hollow eyes, that speak unrest and most unnatural carefulness, give to each tiny, trembling, unelastic form a look of hideous premature old age,

But in the room they entered, the dirty, ragged, miserable crew were all in active performance of their various tasks; the overlookers, strap in hand, on the alert; the whirling spindles urging the little slaves who waited on them to movements as unceasing as their own; and the whole monstrous chamber redolent of all the various impurities that, “by the perfection of our manufacturing system,” are converted into “gales of Araby” for the rich, after passing in the shape of certain poison through the lungs of the poor. So Sir Matthew proudly looked about him, and approved; and though it was athwart that species of haughty frown, in which such dignity as his is apt to clothe itself, Dr. Crockley failed not to perceive, that his friend and patron was in good

humour, and likely to be pleased by any light and lively jestings in which he might indulge. Perceiving, therefore, that little Michael passed on with downcast eyes, unrecognised by any, he wrote upon a slip of paper, for he knew his voice could not be heard, "Make the boy take that bare-legged scavenger wench round the neck, and give her a kiss while she is next lying down, and let us see them sprawling together."

Sir Matthew read the scroll, and grinned applause.

The miserable creature to whom the facetious doctor pointed, was a little girl about seven years old, whose office as "*scavenger*," was to collect incessantly, from the machinery and from the floor, the flying fragments of cotton that might impede the work. In the performance of this duty, the child was obliged, from time to time, to stretch itself with sudden quickness on the ground, while the hissing machinery passed over her; and when this is skilfully done, and the head, body, and outstretched limbs carefully glued to the floor, the steady-moving, but threatening mass, may pass and repass over the dizzy head and trembling body without touching it. But accidents fre-

quently occur; and many are the flaxen locks rudely torn from infant heads in the process.

It was a sort of vague hope that something comical of this kind might occur, which induced Dr. Crockley to propose this frolic to his friend, and probably the same idea suggested itself to Sir Matthew likewise.

"I say, Master Michael!" vociferated the knight in a scream, which successfully struggled with the din, "show your old acquaintance that pride has not got the upper hand of you in your fine clothes. Take scavenger, No. 3, there, round the neck; now—now—now, as she lies sprawling, and let us see you give her a hearty kiss."

The stern and steady machinery moved onward, passing over the body of the little girl, who owed her safety to the miserable leanness of her shrunken frame; but Michael moved not.

"Are you deaf, you little vermin?" roared Sir Matthew. "Now she's down again.—Do what I bid you, or by the living God you shall smart for it!"

Still Michael did not stir, neither did he speak; or, if he did, his young voice was wholly inaudible, and the anger of Sir Matthew was

demonstrated by a clenched fist and threatening brow. "Where the devil is Parsons?" he demanded in accents that poor Michael both heard and understood. "Fine as he is, the strap will do him good."

In saying this, the great man turned to reconnoitre the space he had traversed, and by which his confidential servant must approach, and found that he was already within a good yard of him.

"That's good—I want you, Parsons. Do you see this little rebel here, that I have dressed and treated like one of my own children? What d'ye think of his refusing to kiss Miss No. 3 scavenger, when I bid him?"

"The devil he does?" said the manager grinning; "we must see if we can't mend that. Mind your hits, Master Piecer, and salute the young lady when the mules go back, like a gentleman."

Sir Matthew perceived that his favourite agent feared to enforce his first brutal command, and was forced, therefore, to content himself with seeing the oiled and grimy face of the filthy little girl in contact with that of the now clean and delicate-looking Michael. But he felt he had been foiled, and cast a

glance upon his *protégé*, which seemed to promise that he would not forget it.

Having made known to the superintendent, that it was his pleasure to enter the room where the brother of Michael was at work, Mr. Parsons led the way to the fifth floor of the building; Sir Matthew, however, ordering the door of each chamber, as he passed up, to be opened for him, that he might look in upon his stifling slaves, and satisfy himself that neither wheels nor sinews were loitering in unthrifty repose.

The air that issued from each was nauseous; and on entering the room, at the farther end of which Edward Armstrong was employed, Dr. Crockley secretly resolved, that when making the final arrangements for his promised appointment, it should be specified that he should never enter the working portion of the establishment. For though by no means a particularly scientific practitioner, the little doctor knew quite enough of the business he followed to be aware that, in his own case at least, the air which filled it could not be breathed with impunity.

"Now then, Sir," said Sir Matthew, addressing himself to Michael, while Parsons opened the door on the fifth floor, and an-

nounced that this was the room that contained Edward. "Now, sir, walk on, and find your brother; and, if your pride does not stand in your way, let him be made to understand all the extraordinary kindness I have shown you. Take care that you let him and all his companions know that I have adopted you as one of my own family; and that henceforward they will always see you dressed as well as you are at present."

All that Michael clearly understood from this harangue was, that he had permission to go forward and speak to his brother; and though not venturing quite to run, he moved onward at a pace that speedily brought him within sight of Edward. The little fellow who, despite his gay disguise, immediately recognised him, uttered a cry of joy.

"Love conquered fear;"

and dropping the reel he had just taken between his fingers, he rushed from the place he occupied before the mules, and the next moment was fondly clasped in his brother's arms.

Every labourer in the factory, within sight of the spot where this meeting took place, forgot all standing orders in their astonishment, and stood with gaping mouths and eyes fixed

upon the astounding spectacle. Sir Matthew, too, forgot for an instant that every movement made within that crowded chamber, not having for its object the transmutation of human life into gold, was a positive loss to him ; for the display of his extraordinary benevolence was, he conceived, of high importance, and he looked round with great contentment on the multitude of wondering faces which he saw peering over the machinery in all directions, to gaze on the sight he had prepared for them.

“ This will be talked of, or the devil is in it,” thought he. “ I should like to know who would dare to mention night work and hard usage now. A capital scheme this, as ever was hit upon.”

And from the gazers, he now turned his eyes upon the object that fixed their attention, when, to his inconceivable astonishment and rage, he perceived that the two boys, who still stood locked in each other's arms, were both weeping bitterly.

“ Not loud, but deep,” were the curses that he breathed against the unfortunate object of his affected bounty ; and faithfully did he pledge a promise to his own heart, that he should pay for the vexation he thus occasioned him. But for the present, he condescended to veil the

feeling by a smile more bland than any one ever before witnessed from him within those walls; and striding forwards to the sobbing children, he laid a hand on the shoulder of each, while he said, in a voice that seemed endowed by nature with an especial power of competing with the thunder of a cotton-mill—

“Come, come, my dears! I know you are crying for joy; but you must not go on so, or it will look as if little Michael was ungrateful for all I have done for him! Have you told your brother, dear, how I ordered you to take some nice things home to your mother? That will make him look up, I’ll answer for it! There, now I’ll leave you here that you may tell all your friends that you have been made a gentleman of, on account of your good behaviour, and because you was faithful to your master. Let them have ten minutes, Parsons, with the mules standing still, that they may all hear the story.”

Sir Matthew then turned about, and hastened out of the factory, followed by Dr. Crockley; and as they slowly rode homewards by some round-about lanes that were shaded from the sun, they discussed high thoughts,

“Such as Lyeurgus loved,
When he bade flog the little Spartans;”

and ere they reached the luxurious abode of the knight, had between them sketched such a scheme of political, moral, and religious defence for the factory system in all its branches, and in all its bearings, that the doctor as he descended from his horse, snapped his fingers triumphantly, exclaiming, "A fig for them all, Sir Matthew! If they mine, egad we'll countermine, and we start with a pretty tolerable advantage. You are a man of science, Sir Matthew Dowling; and I need not tell you, that a powerful movement once in action is devilish hard to stop. The *vis inertiae* will work for us, my friend—not to mention that when the animals find out their only alternative is labour or starvation—labour, such and so much as you in your bounty will be pleased to bestow—they will all grow as patient as so many sucking doves."

These words were spoken as they slowly mounted together the steps of the stately portico. Sir Matthew, as a reply, shook his friend cordially by the hand, and leading the way to the cool and lofty library, ordered iced water and claret, to wash away the effect of their half-hour's visit to the factory.

CHAPTER IX.

Some particulars respecting Miss Brotherton—A demonstration of neighbourly friendship and anxiety—The wilfulness of an heiress—A gleam of light caught in the darkness.

THE mansion of Miss Brotherton, at the distance of three miles from the town of Ashleigh, though less splendid in external appearance than that of Sir Matthew Dowling, was quite as elaborately elegant in its interior, and, moreover, incomparably superior to it in every point in which taste was concerned. To this superb home we must now follow the young heiress, as circumstances will hereafter frequently blend her name with that of Michael Armstrong.

The position of Mary Brotherton was a very singular one, and in many respects far from being fortunate. At the age of twenty-one years and eight months, she found herself, by the death of her mother, in the uncontrolled possession of two hundred thousand pounds.

Her father, dead some six or seven years before, had been a manufacturer of the old apprentice system school, and his fortune made long before the humane bill of Sir Robert Peel, the elder, had, in some degree, weakened the chains which bound thousands of friendless orphans to unmeasured and unmitigated drudgery.*

But of all these circumstances, his daughter was totally and altogether ignorant. Educated, from a very early age, at a fashionable London boarding-school, she knew nothing concerning the neighbourhood of her home, but that its hills and valleys were deformed by tall chimneys and dirty smoke; and that none of the young ladies who paid her visits during the holidays were at all like her school-fellows in London.

Of course, the little lady soon learned to know that she was a person of great consequence; and at the age of fourteen had most completely acquired all the airs and graces of a spoiled child. But the death of her father was a great advantage to her; as his only

* It was not till after the first number of this work was printed, that the author learnt that the name of Brotherton existed among the capitalists of Lancashire. But when in that county she heard it mentioned with great esteem.

child, and the only heir of his immense wealth, he rather worshipped than loved her, and the attentions he paid her seemed more like acts of homage than of affection. Had she not given herself airs, he would have been miserable; and had it been possible that any act of hers could bring upon her a reprimand, it would have been something indicating her belief, that she was formed of the same sort of materials as the wretches who toil for him.

Fortunately, however, she was fond of her mother, who, being a great invalid, lived quietly in the midst of her splendour; and the holidays of her daughter were thus passed quietly too, which saved her from much early adulation. She had remained at school till nearly eighteen; and from that time, to the period of her mother's death, which happened about fifteen months before the opening of this narrative, she had led a life of great retirement, dividing her time between attendance in her sick mother's chamber, galloping about the country on horseback, and reading every book she could get hold of, good, bad, and indifferent.

On first finding herself alone in her own great house, the poor girl wept bitterly. Her mother's increasing sufferings had long made

her release from them an event to be ardently desired by the only being who loved her ; but when at last it came, and she had herself to think of, and nobody else, there was something almost terrible in her utter loneliness. She was personally acquainted with very few in the neighbourhood, and felt no affection for any of them. Of relations, to the best of her knowledge and belief, she possessed not one in the world ; and with all her advantages, for she had many, being young, pretty, talented, and rich, she would gladly have changed place during the first weeks of her dismal mourning with any girl of her own age who had father, mother, brother, and sisters to love and be loved by.

Mrs. Gabberly was the nearest neighbour she had on one side, and Lady Clarissa Shrimpton on the other, and both these ladies had occasionally been admitted to see her mother till within a few days of her death. When, therefore, this long-expected event at length took place, they both thought themselves privileged to assume the freedom of intimate friends, and penetrate to the lone boudoir of the mournful heiress. Fortunate for her it was that they did so ; for though neither of them possessed any single quality of suffi-

cient value to win and wear the esteem, or even the liking, of an acute, clear-sighted observer, such as the half-spoiled heiress certainly was, it was better to hear the sound of almost any human voice uttering words of kindness, than to sit lonely and apart, and hear none; so that neither the twaddling larum of Mrs. Gabberly, nor the absurd affectation of Lady Clarissa were without their use.

It might, however, have been somewhat dangerous to the moral developement of the young lady's character had she long continued to find her only relief from sorrow and solitude in the society of persons who could only amuse her by their absurdities. Almost the first time she exerted herself for the purpose of pursuing some of her ordinary occupations, she drew forth her drawing-box, and produced a caricature of Lady Clarissa reciting verses from the pen of Mr. Norval; and the first observations she committed to paper were the result of a tolerably accurate counting of the number of times Mrs. Gabberly had uttered "Well now!" during her last visit.

At length the first dismal fortnight being over, Miss Brotherton appeared at church; and then the whole neighbourhood rushed in

to express their sympathy, till her very soul sickened under the cuckoo-note of sorrowless lamentation. Nevertheless, there was so much of real sadness in the spectacle of a young girl thus left utterly alone in the world, that despite the golden light her wealth threw around her, many among her herd of visitors might have felt more for her, perhaps, than she gave them credit for. But, unfortunately, such persons are not those who make their "griefs and clamour roar" most audibly : so she knew nothing about it, if it were so, and thereby lost any advantage which her temper might have gained from emotions that soothe and soften.

Instead of this, she had to undergo what she felt to be a very severe persecution, from the prodigiously active interest which Mrs. Gabberly took in her, and her concerns. As some of the singularities of Miss Brotherton's character will eventually produce results of considerable importance to our hero, it may not be amiss to recount the particulars of a scene which took place in her boudoir exactly three weeks after the death of her mother.

On the morning in question, Mrs. Gabberly had, as usual, made her way unannounced to the young lady's presence, by dint of that

assumption of extreme intimacy in her manner of inquiring for her, which, in this case, as in a multitude of others, succeeded in putting to the rout the protecting discretion of her servants.

"Well now, dear child!" she exclaimed on entering; "how are you to-day? Upon my word, Mary, you are too pale. You know, my dear, the *palor*, as we call it, is not natural to your complexion, and therefore the symptom must be attended to. Have you any camphor in the house, dear?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Gabberly; but I want nothing of the kind."

"Well now! then I must think of something else."

"Not for me, ma'am, I shall not take any medicine whatever."

"Dear child! How very odd that does seem to me! We people of science, Mary, are so used to turn to it upon all occasions, that it almost looks like losing one's wits altogether to go on so, and take nothing."

"People of no science, ma'am, do not require it."

"Well now! so much the worse for them; but that was not the point I came to talk about. Do you know, my dear, I am perfectly

miserable in my mind about you. I can't sleep at nights for thinking about the impossibility of your living on, all by your own self, in this great palace of a house."

Miss Brotherton turned away her head, and resting her elbow on the mass of cushions that were piled beside her on the sofa, concealed her eyes with her hand, while her neighbour proceeded to discuss her condition.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing in your whole life, my dear? No, never! that's quite certain. It is quite out of the question, and impossible; and to speak out the whole truth at once, it is not in any way decent."

Something a little approaching to a start produced a slight movement in Miss Brotherton. Mrs. Gabberly proceeded.

"Well now, my dear! I have been thinking what you must do, is to find out among your friends and acquaintance, some respectable person in the situation of a gentlewoman to live with you. Somebody already known in the neighbourhood would be the most desirable, because then you would not have the trouble of introducing her; for of course it will be in no wise proper for so young a person as you are to visit about, even in the country, without a proper chaperone."

Again the cushions were slightly moved, but this time it was not a start, but a shudder which caused it.

"Well now, my dear Mary!" resumed the friendly Mrs. Gabberly; "what do you think about it?"

"It requires longer time than I have yet had, before I can answer your question, Mrs. Gabberly," replied the young lady.

"Well now! that's very true, and very discreet, and sensible; and God forbid, my dear, that should make you do any thing in a hurry. Only you must not forget that everybody will be on the look out to observe what you do. Depend upon it that they won't wait to make their remarks—that's all."

The heiress retained her meditative position, but said nothing.

"Don't you think what I have said is true, my dear?"

Mary bowed her head, but without changing the position of the hand which concealed her face.

"I wish she would look up at me," thought Mrs. Gabberly; "I might guess then, perhaps, if there was any chance for me."

"It would be a comfort, as well as a protection, wouldn't it, my dear, to have a kind, affectionate friend, always near you?"

Mary bowed again.

" Well now ! I wish you would open your dear heart, and speak out. Tell me, don't you feel very lonesome, when you sit down to dinner ?"

" I have been long used to that, Mrs. Gabberly."

" Yes ; but then you had not got to think all the time, as I am sure you must do now, that there was *nobody* near you ; that there was *nobody* in the whole great house but your ownself, besides the servants ; that there was *nobody* to drink your health ; *nobody* to say ' Won't you take a little bit more, my dear ? ' *Nobody* to say ' Isn't this very nice ? ' *Nobody* to give you a nod and a smile when you look up. *Nobody* to ask, ' Shall I peel an orange for you, my dear ? ' or, ' Shall I mix your strawberries and cream, my love ? ' Now isn't this all dismal ?"

" Very dismal, ma'am !" replied the young lady in a voice that showed plainly enough that the picture was not an indifferent one.

" Well now ! that's saying something ; and I can't help thinking, dear Mary ! I can't help saying, that it has come into my head that if——"

" Mrs. Gabberly !" cried Miss Brotherton,

starting suddenly up. "I must now beg you to leave me. You have described my situation so forcibly, that I feel more than ever the necessity of making some arrangement that may better it. But I will not do this without reflection. Leave me, now. I thank you for your kind concern, and when next you call upon me, you shall find that what you have said has not been disregarded."

"Well now, that's all right, and I'll go directly. Shall it be to-morrow, dear, that I call again?"

"No, ma'am, if you please, not till next Saturday."

"Saturday? Why, my dear, this is only Monday—it is a great while for me to live in such suspense about you, dearest."

"No, ma'am, not very long. Saturday it must be if you please; and I shall be happy if you will stay and dine here on that day."

"Thank you, my dear. I shall like that very, *very* much indeed. And then we can talk every thing over, my dear Mary. God bless you, my love. Take care of yourself, dearest, till Saturday; and just let me say one word in your ear at parting. Remember, that there is nobody in the whole wide world that loves you as much as I do."

Miss Brotherton submitted herself passively to the embrace which followed; and when the door closed after her affectionate neighbour, she stood, as it seemed, patiently, while her sharp, short, retreating footsteps were heard along the spacious corridor, and when they were heard no more she applied her hand to the bell. But something made her pause ere she rang it, and stepping to a window, that opened upon a balcony filled with skilfully shaded exotics, she peeped forth from among them, till the active-moving little figure of Mrs. Gabberly trudging along the drive below became visible, and then the heiress turned again to the bell-rope, and pulled it vigorously.

"Tell nurse Tremlett—tell Mrs. Tremlett to be so kind as to come to me immediately," was the order given to the servant who answered it.

After the interval of a few minutes, during which Miss Brotherton stood with her arm resting on the mantelpiece, with a countenance and attitude of deep meditation, the door opened again, and a pale, thin, little woman entered, who, had not her wrinkles and gray locks betrayed her, might have passed for five-and-twenty, so active and nicely moulded was

her little person. But despite her still clear and bright black eye, her face showed that she could not honestly count less than twice that sum of years.

"Come in, dear nurse!" said Miss Brotherton, kindly, "come in, and sit down by me."

The old woman obeyed this command without further ceremony; and, by her manner of doing it, showed plainly that it was not an uncommon one.

"What have you been about, my child?" said she, "you don't look well."

"I dare say not," replied Mary abruptly, "I have been bored and plagued, nurse Tremlett; and now I am going to bore and plague you, in order to comfort myself."

For all this answer, the chartered nurse put her arm round the young lady's neck, and gave her a very loving kiss.

"Nay, it is very true, Mrs. Tremlett; and no joke in it, I do assure you. I am going to make a terrible change in your manner of life, my dear old woman. I am going to make a state-prisoner of you."

"You may plague and puzzle your old nurse as much as you like, my darling, so you will but smile and look a little less dismal than you have done of late. And what is it you

are going to do to me, Miss Mary? I dare say it is nothing that I shall think very hard."

"I don't know that, Mrs. Tremlett," replied Miss Brotherton very gravely.

"Mrs. Tremlett, and Mrs. Tremlett," said the old woman, looking earnestly at her, "what does that mean, Miss Mary?—I don't like it."

"I know you won't like it. But you must bear that, and a great deal more, my dear old friend. You must make up your mind to lead a new life altogether; and I am very much afraid that you will not like the change."

"Oh! goodness, Miss Mary, what is it you mean? You are not going to send me away from you, are you?"

"Is that the worst thing I could do to vex you?" said the young lady, very cordially returning the caress she had received; "you need not be afraid of that, at any rate. The misfortune I threaten is of quite a different kind."

"Well, then, I shan't mind it, let it be what it will. But I don't think it is any thing very bad, my dear; for you look as if you were ready to laugh, though you try to look grave, and talk of a misfortune."

"It will be no misfortune to me, I assure you, but quite the contrary. I shall like it very much, and that is the reason you see me ready to smile; and if you will be a dear good woman, and make no difficulties about it, all will go well. Mrs. Gabberly has been here, nurse Tremlett; and she tells me that I must immediately take some elderly lady into the house, to sit with me and take care of me; because, as she says, I am too young to live alone, and that all the neighbourhood will be making remarks upon me."

"Well, my dear, and I dare say she says no more than the truth. Your great fortune, and your prettiness, and all that, will certainly bring many and many an eye upon you, my dear child; and, of course, it won't do for you to go on without having some steady lady of a companion like, to be living with you."

"But I hate all ladies that would come to live as a *companion like*," replied the young lady. "What should I do with a Miss Mogg, trotting about after me, to ask if I wanted my smelling-bottle, or my pug-dog? And that is not the worst that could happen to me either. As sure as you are there, nurse Tremlett, Mrs. Gabberly has made up her mind to come and live here as my companion herself!"

"And you would not like that, by your manner, my dear? I do think she is rather too bustling and busy for you. You are such a reader that you would not like any one that was over-talkative and fidgety about you. But don't fret yourself for that, dear; you must make some civil sort of excuse to Mrs. Gabberly. You are clever enough to find one, I dare say."

"Yes, nurse Tremlett, I think I am—I have found one already."

"That's very right, Miss Mary; and what shall you say to her, my dear?"

"I shall tell her that you are going to live with me as my companion."

"Nonsense, dear! That is the joke, is it, that you were looking so merry about?"

"Mrs. Tremlett, I am not jesting in any way," replied Miss Brotherton, very gravely; "and I entreat you to listen to my proposal as seriously as I make it. I am friendless, very friendless, dear nurse; and trust me, with all my money, I am greatly to be pitied. Why, in addition to the misfortune of not having a relation in the world, should I be doomed to the misery of hiring a stranger to pester me with her presence from morning to night? It is a penance that I cannot and will not endure. Yet

I know that all people will say that I ought not to sit up here alone to receive company, and I do not wish to be spoken of as a person who either knows not or values not propriety. But if you will do what I desire, Mrs. Tremlett, you may save me from this, and from what I perhaps should unhappily consider as a greater misfortune still, namely, the being forced to pass my life with a person whose presence was a pain to me."

Tears flowed down the cheeks of the heiress as she spoke; and the devoted servant who sat beside her, though absolutely confounded by the strange proposal, could find no words to utter in opposition to it.

"Dear nurse!—you will not forsake me, then?" said Mary, smiling through her tears. "There's a dear soul—you will let me have my own way in everything—about your dress, you know, and all that? It will be worth any thing in the world to see Mrs. Gabberly, when she first beholds you sitting up in state in the drawing-room!"

From the moment the old woman had perceived that her beloved, but wilful darling was not only serious, but sorrowful, and that, too, concerning no imaginary grief, but from the contemplation of the truly melancholy isolation

of her condition, all disposition to resist her vanished ; and yet nurse Tremlett was perfectly capable of perceiving all the inconveniences likely to arise on both sides from so strange a scheme. But even while such thoughts silently took possession of her, leaving perhaps some legible traces on her countenance, her young mistress looked so kindly and so coaxingly in her face, as if at once reading and deprecating all she had to say, that she felt nothing was left for her but obedience.

"Do what you will with me, my dear," said she, with a fond smile and a shake of the head, that seemed to say, "I know you must have your own way, Mary."

And thus was conceived and established a mode of life for the pretty heiress, which left her as completely uncontrolled as to all she did, and all she said, as if nurse Tremlett still occupied her quarters in what was once called the nursery, but had since become the favoured nurse's sitting-room.

Mary's delight in dressing and drilling the old woman for her new duties was childish and excessive ; and most triumphant was the satisfaction with which she perceived that rich black silks, and delicate white crape, performed their office upon her nice little person so effectually,

as to give her quite as much the air of a gentlewoman as the majority of those who were likely to meet her.

So, on the following Saturday, Mrs. Gabberly found Miss Brotherton no longer the solitary occupant of her elegant boudoir, but with a remarkably well-dressed elderly lady, seated in the most luxurious of all the newly-invented chairs which decorated the apartment, with a small work-table before her; while on the footstool at her feet sat the heiress, looking a vast deal more happy than she had ever before seen her.

The mystification did not last long. The eyes of Mrs. Gabberly were of that happy fabric which enables the owner to retain for ever the memory of every face they have ever looked upon; and it was with heightened colour, and no very sweet expression of countenance, that she exclaimed, "Soh! you have taken your old nurse Tremlett to sit with you?"

"My nurse no longer, but my most kind friend, Mrs. Gabberly, who has affectionately consented to forsake many of her former comforts, in order to be useful to me. You will perceive, ma'am, that your advice has not been lost upon me."

“ Well now! that is a strange whim, Miss Brotherton. But, of course, you are not serious in trying to make me believe that it is your intention to let nurse Tremlett assist you in receiving your company. If it be so, I think it but fair to tell you at once, as my experience is rather greater than yours, that not one single soul among all our rich folks will care to visit you at all. I don’t wish to affront you, nurse Tremlett; but you won’t contradict what I say, I am quite sure of that.”

Mrs. Tremlett showed herself an apt scholar, for she bowed her head, went on with her knitting, and said nothing.

If she was silent, however, Miss Brotherton was not. “ Listen to me, ma’am, if you please, for a few minutes, while I explain to you my ideas on the subject; and having done so, I desire that it may never be alluded to again. I am left, Mrs. Gabberly—as I dare say you know exceedingly well—in the possession of an ample fortune, with unlimited power to spend it as I please. Now I do not please to spend any part of it in putting myself under circumstances that I should feel annoying to me. For this reason I will not hire a gentlewoman—in all human probability of much higher birth than myself—to watch my caprices, and endure my

whims. If any one now in existence really loves me, it is Mrs. Tremlett; and I, too, most sincerely love her; therefore I flatter myself, that drawing tighter the tie that has long united us will occasion pain to neither. If the obscure tradition I have heard respecting my grandfather be correct, he received much kindness when travelling the country as an itinerant tinker from Mrs. Tremlett's father, then a flourishing farmer in Yorkshire. So you perceive, Mrs. Gabberly, that I am really honoured by the association. But if any one should fancy the contrary—if any one should feel that the luxuries of my house and table—the only attractions I know of by which I may hope to draw my neighbours round me—if any should feel that the value of these are lessened by the presence of Mrs. Tremlett, they must give them up. For the price I shall put upon my good dinners and fine balls will be the most courteous and kind politeness to that dear and valued friend. And now that we have finally and for ever dismissed this subject, will you tell me if I may hope for the pleasure of your company at dinner to-day, Mrs. Gabberly?"

From this period Mrs. Tremlett never quitted Mary Brotherton, excepting when the heiress accommodated Lady Clarissa Shrimpton by

the use of her carriage, when they were both going to visit at the same mansion ; an arrangement which had often taken place during the late Mrs. Brotherton's lifetime, and which was of such very obvious mutual convenience, that one was rarely invited without the other.

Miss Brotherton by degrees recovered her natural high spirits, and though she not unfrequently felt the weight of great loneliness, she was rapidly learning to enjoy her independence. She read a great deal, though nobody knew anything about it. She dearly loved flowers, and often assisted in their culture with her own hands, despite her half-dozen gardeners. She laid out whole miles of gravel walks in her own grounds with almost as much skill as went to form the Cretan labyrinth, in order that she might walk, and walk, and walk, without passing her own lodge-gates, and so running the risk of being called "*imprudent*." She still indulged herself, and with no sparing licence, in caricaturing her neighbours ; and, if all the truth must be told, derived no small portion of amusement from the variety of modes she adopted to assure the almost innumerable pretenders to her hand, that it was not in her power to reward their valuable and flattering attachments.

Such was Mary Brotherton's condition when she complied with Lady Clarissa Shrimpton's request to drive over to Dowling Lodge the day after they had dined there. Upon this occasion, as upon many previous ones, the young lady, for lack of other amusement, occupied herself in selecting subjects for her merry pencil. The best excuses to be offered for offences in this line is, that nobody but Mrs. Tremlett ever saw her saucy productions; so that assuredly they gave pain to no one—and when the heart is empty, and the head full, much allowance must be made for such freaks and fancies.

While laying up stores of sketches from Sir Matthew, Lady Clarissa, and the poet, her eye suddenly became fixed upon the beautiful child who had been brought in for general examination. Like most other ready limners of the human face, Miss Brotherton had considerable skill in physiognomy, and ere she had long gazed on the pretty, nicely-dressed little boy, she felt persuaded that in spite of his gay *habit de fête*, the child was ill-at-ease, and under great discomfort.

It is difficult for persons residing at a distance, and *not* "to the manner born," to conceive the extraordinary degree of ignorance in

which the ladies of the great manufacturing families are brought up as to the real condition of the people employed in the concern from whence their wealth is derived.

There is, however, a homely proverb that may help to explain this: "You should never speak of a rope in the house of a man that was hanged;" and it is probably on the same principle, that no one speaks of the factory in the house of the manufacturer. Be this as it may, the fact is certain, and Mary Brotherton, like perhaps a hundred other rich young ladies of the same class, grew up in total ignorance of the moans and the misery that lurked beneath the unsightly edifices which she just knew were called the factories, but which were much too ugly in her picturesque eyes for her ever to look at them when she could help it.

Little did the kind-tempered, warm-hearted girl guess, that for hours before she raised her healthy and elastic frame from the couch where it had luxuriously reposed through the night, thousands of sickly, suffering children were torn from their straw pallets, to commence a long, unvaried day of painful toil, to fill the ever-craving purses, of which her own was one. She knew that Sir Matthew Dowling was considered as the richest man in the district—richer even

than her father had been, and this was all she knew about him, except that her own sharp observation had enabled her to perceive that he was ignorant, vulgar, and most ludicrously crammed with pretensions of all sorts.

After having looked into the face of little Michael till she was perfectly convinced of his being exceedingly unhappy, she next directed her attention to his benefactor, as she heard him clamorously hailed on all sides; and his countenance, though smiling, spoke a language she liked not. It was evident to her that he was very keenly watching the boy, and more than once she detected a look from Sir Matthew, directed towards him, which was instantly followed by an attempt on the child's part to look less miserable.

Then followed all the nonsense about Mr. Osmond Norval, and his promised drama, which was to place upon the scene some prodigiously generous action of Sir Matthew Dowling's towards this little boy. Mary Brotherton did not believe a word of it, and sick of the false and fulsome flattery that was bandied about between the knight, the lady, and the poet, she made, as we have seen, a somewhat hasty retreat.

On her road home she was more than usually silent, being occupied in a meditation on the features of Michael Armstrong. For some time she suffered her ridiculous ladyship to run on in a violent strain of panegyric upon Sir Matthew, his talents, and his generosity, without offering any interruption; but at length it struck her that, fool as she was, Lady Clarissa might be able to tell her what she wanted to know; and therefore, after answering "Indeed!" to some tirade about Sir Matthew's great qualities, Mary ventured to come across the torrent of her ladyship's eloquence by saying,

"Pray, Lady Clarissa, who is that little boy?"

"Who, my dear? Good gracious, what an odd question! Is it possible you do not know he is a poor little factory-boy, that Sir Matthew has most benevolently taken out of that sad way of life, because he behaved so remarkably well about that cow, you know, my dear, last night."

"But why should you call it a sad way of life, Lady Clarissa? It is the way that all our poor people get their bread, you know."

"Yes, I suppose so. But yet, my dear, you cannot but allow that it must be a very different

way of life from what the little children lead whose parents, from father to son, for a dozen generations, have worked on the domains of one family. There can't be the same sort of family feeling and attachment, you know. However, I have not the least doubt in the world that good Sir Matthew does his very best to make them comfortable."

"Is this boy to live in Sir Matthew's family?"

"I am not quite sure about that. I believe it depends in a great degree upon the manner in which the little fellow behaves; and so it ought, you know, my dear Miss Brotherton. I rather think Mr. Augustus was making himself too agreeable this morning for you to hear much of the story. However, the exquisite muse of our friend Norval will set the transaction before all the world in a proper point of view; and then you, like everybody else, will be able to form your own judgment respecting the conduct of Sir Matthew."

Again Mary sunk into a reverie concerning the respective countenances of Sir Matthew and the little factory-boy; but feeling quite sure that she should obtain none of the information she was burning with impatience to acquire from Lady Clarissa, the remaining part

of the drive was passed entirely in silence on her part, excepting that when Lady Clarissa asked her if she did not intend to take a part in the theatrical performances about to be brought out at Dowling Lodge, she replied, "No, certainly, Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, do not."

CHAPTER X.

More wilfulness on the part of the Heiress—Private theatricals—Failure of a young performer, and its consequences—Philosophical breakfast-table—A morning's excursion.

No sooner did Miss Brotherton enter the room where she had left her old friend, who was still tranquilly enjoying the perfumed air which visited her through the open window as she sat knitting before it, than throwing her bonnet on one side, she began to examine and cross-examine her as follows:—

“Pray, Mrs. Tremlett, do you know anything about the factory people that work in all these great ugly buildings round about Ashleigh?”

Mrs. Tremlett looked up at her for a moment before she replied, and then said, “I know very little about them, Miss Mary,—not much more than you do, I believe.”

“I have just been thinking, Mrs. Tremlett,

how exceedingly wrong it is that I should be so profoundly ignorant on the subject."

"Wrong?—I don't see anything wrong, my dear, in your not knowing what you was never told."

"I have been wrong in never wishing to be told; but, in truth, I have never thought upon the subject, and I have been very wrong in this. That silly body, Lady Clarissa, said a few words to-day, which—quite unlike the usual effect of what she utters—made a great impression upon me. Speaking of the children who work in these factories, nurse Tremlett, she said theirs was a very different way of life from that of the children whose parents, from father to son, have worked for a dozen generations on the lands of the same family. There could not be the same sort of family feeling and attachment, she said. But why should there not, Mrs. Tremlett? These people work on, I dare say, from generation to generation, and yet, God help them, poor souls!—from the hour of my birth to the present day, I never heard anybody talk of attachment to them. Can you explain this difference to me? I do not at all understand it; but I am quite certain it cannot be right. Why do not we know something about our

poor people, as the people with landed estates do about theirs?"

"Upon my word, my dear, you have asked me a question not over and above easy to answer—that is to say, as to its being right. But it is easy enough too, in another way, for I may say plain and straight, without any fear of blundering, that the thing is impossible."

"What thing is impossible, Mrs. Tremlett?"

"Why that the factory people should be noticed by the gentlefolks, and treated in the same way as labourers that work the land."

"You are too wise a woman, Mrs. Tremlett," replied Mary, "to assert so positively what you did not know to be true; therefore I will take it for granted, that it is impossible for people working in a factory to be treated in the same way as people working on a farm. And now, seeing, God help me! that I am most frightfully ignorant, I must beg you to tell me what it is that causes this extraordinary dissimilarity between the different classes of the labouring poor?"

"My dear child, it would hardly be decent to enter into all the reasons. Country folks, that is the field-labourers I mean, are just as likely to be good and virtuous as their betters, and so they are for everything that I have ever

seen to the contrary. But it is altogether a different thing with the factory people. By what I can hear, for of course I never went among them, they are about the worst set of creatures that burden God's earth. The men are vicious, and the women dissolute, taking drams often, and often when they ought to buy food; and so horridly dirty and unthrifty, that it is a common saying, you may know a factory-girl as far as you can see her. So I leave you to judge, Miss Mary, whether such ladies as visit the cottages of the poor peasantry could have anything to say to such as these."

Mary uttered no reply, but sat for many minutes with eyes steadfastly fixed upon the carpet. At length she raised them again to the face of her companion, and said, "It is, then, among such people as these that children, almost babies—for such is the one I have just seen—are often employed?"

"Often, my dear? They are always employed with them. And there's no particular hardship in that you know, because these very men and women are the parents of the children, and so they could not be separated any how."

"What a dreadful class of human beings, then, must these factory people form! Is it not

considered as a great misfortune, Mrs. Tremlett, to the whole country?"

"Why as to that, my dear Miss Mary, there's many will tell you that it is the finest thing in the world for the places where the great factories are established, because they give employment to so many thousands of men, women, and even the very smallest children that can stand, almost. But you must not ask me, my dear, what I think about that, for of course I am no fair judge at all. I, that spent my childhood in playing among the harebells, racking up little cocks of hay for the hardest work I was put to, and going to school to read, write, and sew, like the child of decent Christian parents in a civilized country—I can hardly pass fair judgment on goings on so very different. But I have heard, my dear, for I believe these things are talked of more in the servants' halls than among the great manufacturers themselves, especially when the ladies are by,—I have heard that a great many of the learned gentlemen in parliament say, that the whole system is a blessing to the country."

"Then your account of it must be a very false one, nurse Tremlett," said the young heiress severely.

"I only speak after much that I have heard

and a little that I have seen," replied the old woman meekly. " However, my dear, dear Miss Brotherton," she added, " if you will take an old servant's advice, who loves you very dearly, you will just make up your mind neither to talk, nor to think any more upon the subject. I am quite sure that it will give you no pleasure, and it does not seem possible to me that you should do any good: for you know, my dear, that you have nothing at all to do with any of the factories now, any more than Lady Clarissa herself. Will you promise to take my advice, my dear child, and think no more about it?"

" On the contrary, Mrs. Tremlett," replied the young lady; " I am perfectly determined that for some time to come I will think of nothing else."

* * * * *

Mary Brotherton kept her word. During the whole time that the Dowling Lodge theatricals were in preparation, while every other young heart in the neighbourhood, male or female, was eagerly anticipating the *fête*, her's was fixed steadfast and immoveable upon the mysterious subject that had seized upon it. That man was born to labour, that he was condemned to live by the sweat of his brow, she

knew from high authority ; and though, under the social compacts which civilization has led to, some portion of every race have found the means of performing the allotted task vicariously, she felt not called upon to say that the arrangement was a bad one. It was by no means difficult to conceive why it was so, nor why of necessity it ever must be so. She felt, as all must do, who reflect on the subject, that if all distinctions were by some accident suddenly removed, and the entire organization of society to begin *de novo*, each man standing precisely on the same level as his neighbour, the earth would not complete one revolution round the sun ere the equality would be violated.

“ Strength will be lord of imbecility.”

And when nature made one man more active, more intelligent, or more powerful of frame than another, she made the law in which originated inequality of condition. That, as time rolled on, and mankind became bound together nation by nation, substituting the conventional distinctions of civilized society for those derived from individual strength,—that, when this happened, occasional anomalies should appear in the arrangement, seemed inevitable, and of necessity to be endured.

That it was inevitable, she conceived to be pretty nearly proved by the fact that no single authentic record makes mention of a nation in which hereditary distinction of some kind or other did not exist. Nor did it seem desirable that when the prowess, the wit, the wisdom, or the toil of an individual had endowed him with wealth beyond his fellows, he should be denied the dear privilege of endowing withal the children he loved, instead of leaving it at his death to be struggled for, and borne away by the most crafty or the most strong. All this, Mary Brotherton, in her little wisdom of twenty-two years and a half, could without difficulty reason upon and understand. But that among those whom fate or fortune had doomed to labour some should be cherished, valued, honoured by the masters who received and paid their industry, while "other some" were doomed, under the same compact of labour and payment, to the scorn, avoidance, and contempt of the beings whose wealth and greatness proceeded from their toil, was an enigma she could in no wise comprehend.

"There must be something wrong," argued the young girl, as day by day she paced her gravel walks in solitary meditation; "there

must be something deeply, radically wrong in a system that leads to such results. I may perhaps be silly enough to look with something approaching envy at the noble who traces his thirty descents unbroken from the venerable ancestor, whose valour won in a hard-fought field the distinction he still bears on his armorial coat; yet when I look round upon what the industry of my father—the only one of his race whose name I ever heard—when I contemplate what one man's industry can bequeath to his child, I feel that there is no very substantial cause for complaining of hereditary inferiority of condition. Nay, were I one of the peasants of whom the Lady Clarissa and nurse Tremlett speak, I can well enough believe that I might live and die contented with a life of healthful and respected toil. But to exist in the condition of these outcast labourers—to be thrust out, as it were, beyond the pale that surrounds and protects society—to live like the wretch, smitten by the witches' curse, 'a man forbid,' must be hard to bear. Children, young creatures still wearing the stamp of heaven fresh upon their brows, are, as it seems, amongst these wretched ones. I will find out why this is so, or be

worried to death by Sir Matthew Dowling and his fellow great ones in the attempt."

Towards the end of the month which preceded the grand display expected at Dowling Lodge, Mr. Osmond Norval requested permission to submit his composition to Miss Brotherton's perusal; a compliment she graciously consented to receive, being desirous, before she witnessed its performance, of learning all she could respecting Sir Matthew's rather mysterious adoption of the factory-boy, and also of the poor child's equally mysterious sufferings under the benevolent process that was performing on him.

The little drama, therefore, which for obvious classical reasons the poet denominated "A Masque," reached her hands enveloped in delicately-scented paper. But all she learned thereby was, that Mr. Norval had thought proper to entitle it "Gratitude and Goodness; or The Romance of Dowling Lodge," and to prelude it by a sonnet to be spoken by himself as prologue, in which a modest allusion was made to Milton's composition of Comus for the use of the Bridgewater family. She had, moreover, the gratification of discovering in what order Sir Matthew, Lady Clarissa,

the poet, the governess, most of the young Dowlings, and little Michael himself were to appear upon the scene, and then she returned the young gentleman's MS. with a very honest assurance that she doubted not the composition would most satisfactorily answer every purpose for which it was intended.

Absurd as the whole business appeared to her, she resolved to be present at the representation; and, having perceived, in her study of the exits and entrances, that no part was allotted to the homely Martha, she determined to place herself near her during the performance, in the hope of eliciting the information she was so anxious to obtain.

On many occasions Miss Brotherton had remarked that this young lady either kept herself, or was kept very much apart from the rest of the family, which circumstance had been quite sufficient to propitiate her kindness, for most cordially did Mary Brotherton dislike the whole Dowling race. But so deep-seated was the feeling of poor Martha herself that nobody did or could wish to converse with her, that the handshakings and smiles of the heiress had never suggested to her the idea that she might wish to be better acquainted. This shyness had hitherto effectually kept them

apart ; but no sooner did Mary perceive that the neglected girl was the only one of the family, above the age of a mere baby, to whom no part in Mr. Norval's drama was allotted, than she resolved to profit by the circumstance, and, if possible, get from her such a commentary upon the piece as might enable her to comprehend its plot and underplot.

Accordingly, when the great night of representation arrived, Miss Brotherton reached the Lodge somewhat before the hour named in the invitation, and finding, as she expected, the room where the company were to be received unoccupied, she desired one of the liveried attendants to send Miss Martha Dowling's maid to her. A female servant soon appeared. "Are you Miss Martha's maid?" said the young lady.

"Oh! dear no, ma'am, I am Miss Dowling's and Miss Harriet's maid. Miss Martha never wants a lady's maid at all; but I can take any message from you, ma'am, that you may please to send."

Miss Brotherton took one of her own cards, and wrote upon it with a pencil—"Dear Miss Martha, if you are not going to act in the play, will you have the kindness to come to me."

This note the *soubrette*, as in duty bound, first showed to her own young ladies.

"Good gracious! How very odd! What can Miss Brotherton have to say to Martha? Martha! of all people in the world. She is not ill, Crompton, is she?" said Miss Arabella.

"Oh! dear no, ma'am—at least she don't look so. She seemed in a great hurry, however, for me to take the card."

"Well, take it then," cried Miss Harriet, impatiently, "and make haste, or I shall never get my ringlets done: they take such a time. Do give her the card, Arabella. What good is there in spelling it over a dozen times? I dare say she only wants to cross-question her about Augustus, and what he's going to act. So take the card, Crompton, and run with it to Martha as fast as you can."

Crompton and the card found Martha sitting still undressed in the obscure little room allotted to her in the children's wing. She was deep in the pages of a new romance, and being, if possible, more certain than usual that her presence would not be wanted, had made up her mind to enjoy herself till the time arrived for the commencement of the play, when it was her purpose to join the large party invited, in their progress from the drawing-room to the theatre.

On receiving Miss Brotherton's card, however, she hastily resumed the business of her toilet; for though the summons was as unintelligible to her as to her sisters, she felt, at least, an equal desire that it should be civilly complied with. It never took long to make poor Martha as smart as she ever thought it necessary to be, and in a very few minutes she joined Miss Brotherton in the drawing-room.

"This is very kind of you, Miss Martha. I hope I have not hurried you?" said the heiress, taking her hand so kindly that the shy girl could not but feel encouraged to speak to her with rather more confidence than usual.

"Why are you not going to take a part?" was the next question.

"I take a part! Oh! Miss Brotherton, what should I make of acting?" said Martha, laughing and blushing, in reply.

"Nay, I think you are very right, Martha. I assure you nothing could have persuaded me to have made the attempt. But I thought that if you did not play you would perhaps have the kindness to take charge of me, and let me sit by you; for unless I have somebody to tell me what it all means I shall be horribly puzzled."

"I will tell you everything I can," replied

Martha, good-humouredly. "But I don't think I understand much about it myself."

"What sort of a little boy is it that your papa has been so kind to? Everybody is talking about it, and Lady Clarissa says there is something quite sublime in what he is going to do for him. But I suppose Sir Matthew must have remarked some qualities particularly amiable and good in the child, or he would not distinguish him so remarkably from all others of the same class."

"You have heard the story of his saving Lady Clarissa Shrimpton from the cow that was going to toss her, have you not, Miss Brotherton?"

"Yes, my dear, I heard all that, you know, the morning I was here;—though, by the by, you were not in the room, I remember. But there must be something more in it than that. Do tell me all you know."

"Indeed I don't know anything more," said Martha.

"What sort of a child is it?"

"A very nice little fellow indeed, and I think if I had been papa I should have done the same thing myself."

"Really! Then you do think this child is something out of the common way, I suppose?"

Pray tell me, dear Martha, will you, if you hear much about the people that work in the factories, and the children in particular ?

"No, indeed, Miss Brotherton, I know nothing in the world about them ; except that I sometimes hear papa say that they are all very idle and ungrateful," replied Martha.

"I have been told that they are a very wretched set of people. But, perhaps, they cannot help it, Martha ?" returned Mary.

"I do not know how that can be, Miss Brotherton ; everybody can help being idle, and everybody can help being ungrateful, I should think."

"But it seems that they all live together, and make one another worse ; and, in that case, the children are very much to be pitied ; for, poor little things, they cannot help themselves. What makes you think this little boy is a nice child ? Have you ever talked to him much ?"

"Yes, a good deal ; but papa has been taking him about to a great many houses ; and besides, he has been occupied very much in learning his part, for Duo, who was teaching him, said that he could hardly read at all. So I have been trying to help him, and he is very quick. But I like him, too, because he

appears so fond of his mother and brother. He cares for nothing that can be given him, unless he can take some of it to them."

"And does your papa let him do so?"

"Oh! yes, every day."

"That *is* very kind. Then I suppose the little fellow is superlatively happy?"

"I don't know," replied Martha, with a slight shake of the head.

"It is very strange if he be not," observed Miss Brotherton. "If he were kept from his mother I could easily understand that he might be very miserable, notwithstanding the great good luck that has befallen him; but if he is permitted to see her constantly, I can't imagine what he can want more."

"I don't know," again replied Martha.

The expected guests began now rapidly to assemble, and refreshments were handed round previous to their being conducted to the room prepared for the evening's amusement. "Don't forsake me, dear Martha!" whispered Miss Brotherton, "I am not very intimate with any of these ladies and gentlemen, and I shall not enjoy the evening's amusement unless I am seated next you."

Martha felt a good deal surprised at the compliment, but readily agreed to the pro-

posal ; and, in a few minutes, Lady Dowling, who was anything rather than pleased by the whole affair, gave the assembled party to understand that the time fixed for their entering the theatre had arrived.

On tiptoe with curiosity, and eager, beyond measure, to see what Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, Mr. Osmond Norval, and "all the Dowlings" would look like on the stage, the numerous company almost ran over one another in the vehement zeal with which they prepared to obey her.

Of course no expense had been spared in fitting up the apartment allotted to the purpose in form and style as like as might be to a theatre ; and, thanks to the taste and ingenuity of the little French governess, the thing had been not only expensively but well done. The space railed in for the orchestra very conveniently divided the company from the actors ; and, when the curtain drew up, the well-lighted stage exhibited just such a carpeted, draperied, mirrored, and flower-adorned arena as well-dressed amateur ladies and gentlemen delighted to appear in.

The very sight of the stage elicited a shout of applause ; and when Mr. Osmond Norval, habited at all points according to the most

accredited draped portraits of Apollo, came forth from behind the sky-blue silken hangings which formed the *coulisses*, all the ladies began clapping till their little palms and fingers tingled with the unwonted exercise.

The young poet certainly looked very handsome; and not the less so because he knew that besides Miss Brotherton's eyes, which he was certain must be fixed upon him (though he could not distinguish her in the obscure corner in which she had chosen to place herself beside Martha), those of Miss Arabella and Miss Harriet Dowling (both estimated at twenty thousand pounds) were fixed upon him too. Not to mention the speaking orbs of Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, whose nobility he had little doubt might be won to smile upon and endow him with all the earthly goods she had, could he make up his mind to believe that he could do no better.

All this flattered, excited, and inspired him most becomingly; and as he stood with one silken leg slightly advanced, and so firmly planted as to require only the toe of its fellow to support him from behind, with a lyre suspended round his neck, and a wreath of bay-leaves mixing with the dark curls upon his brow, at least two dozen young ladies in the

manufacturing interest declared to their secret souls that they never could hope to see another like him.

Having first recited the pretty sonnet before mentioned, in which he modestly hinted at more points of resemblance than one between himself and Milton, he suddenly changed his hand, and having, as he expressed it to Lady Clarissa, "gleaned with the hand of a master," he spoke the following lines, which, in the copies printed for private circulation, were headed

"SHAKSPERIAN PROLOGUE.

"Open your ears! For which of you will stop
The seat of hearing, when loud rumour speaks?
I, from the orient to the drooping west,
Making the wind my post-horse, will unfold
The act performed by virtuous Dowling here.
Oh! for a muse of fire that should ascend
The brightest heaven of description!
Then should the noble Dowling, like himself
Assume the form of mercy; and, at his heels,
Leashed in like hounds, should famine, pain, and labour,
Crouch, all-subdued," &c. &c.

The applause which followed this lasted so long that the performers began to fear there would not be time enough left for the piece. But by degrees the tumult subsided, Apollo was permitted to retire, and the business of the scene began.

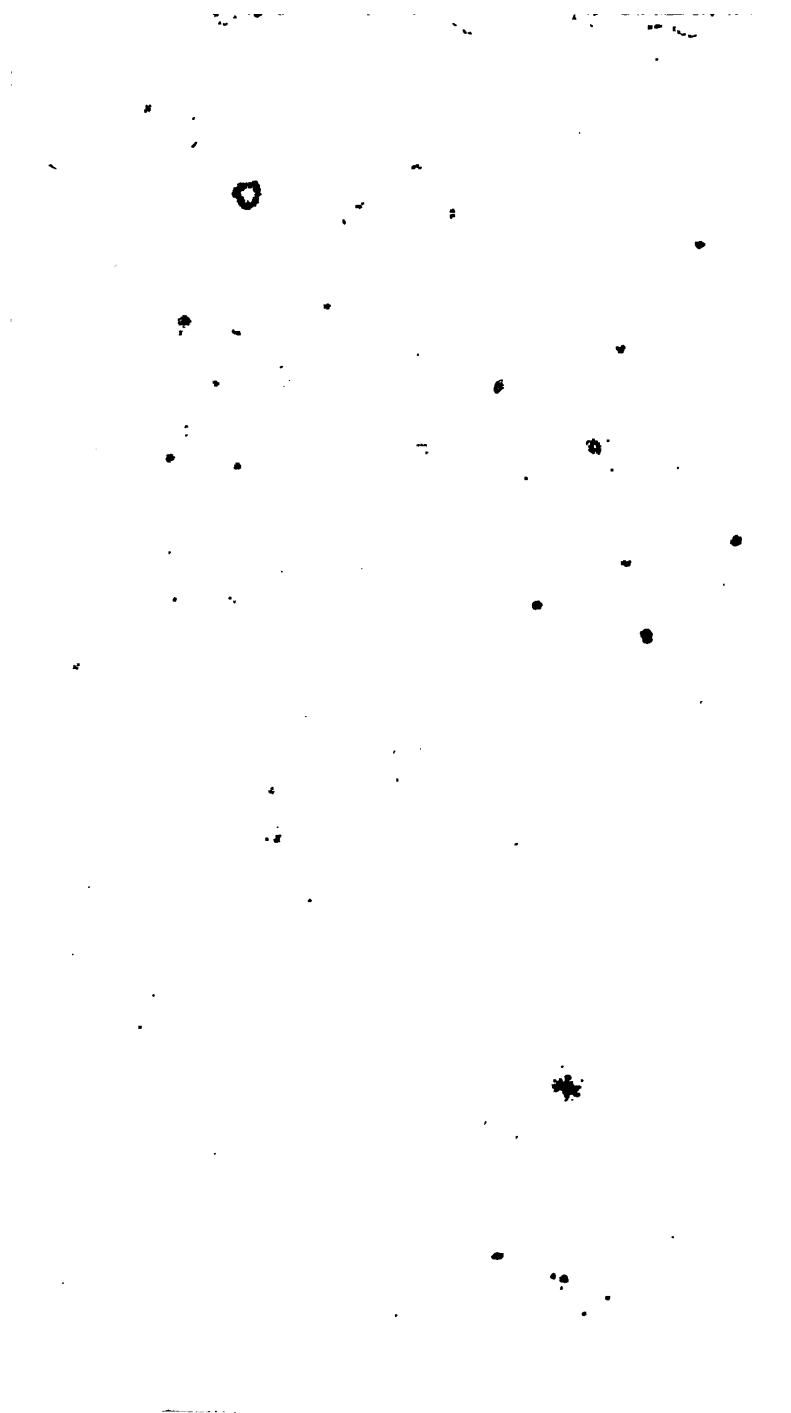
There was something more nearly approaching a balance of power at Dowling Lodge than is often to be found in the domestic arrangements of gentlemen and their wives—for, though it may be a very doubtful point, whether man or wife most frequently get the mastery, it but rarely happens that the matter long remains unsettled. At Dowling Lodge, however, there was a beautiful alternation of power, which the measured movement of the engine in their factories, first sending up one side, and then the other, might, perhaps, have suggested. If matters came to a downright quarrel, however, Sir Matthew was sure to be the conqueror; for her ladyship got frightened, and gave in: but when any differences of opinion arose on points of no great importance, the lady's murmurings and mutterings were equally sure to be victorious, and Sir Matthew let her have her way, merely because, like the organ-grinder, "he knew the wally of peace and quiet."

On the subject of the private theatricals, there was, most decidedly, a difference of opinion between the heads of the Dowling family, and some rough skirmishing might have ensued, had not Mademoiselle Beaujoie hinted to her good friend, Sir Matthew, that if they

could introduce a scene or two, where all the dear little children could be shown off, Lady Dowling's objections would probably give way, the experiment was made, and answered completely: on condition that "Gratitude and Goodness" should open and close with scenes in which the whole family should appear in fancy dresses, and be grouped by the dancing-master in the most graceful attitudes he could invent, Lady Dowling withdrew her opposition. As soon, therefore, as Apollo had retired from the front of the stage, no less than sixteen male and female Dowlings rushed forth from the silken hangings, and formed themselves, after some little confusion, into a *tableau*, declared, on all sides, to be of unrivalled beauty. Again bravoës and clapping of hands announced the delight of the spectators; and, when this was calmed, some very pompous verses gave notice that this display of youthful grace and beauty was on occasion of a rustic fête, in which the *dramatis personæ* were to amuse themselves *al fresco*. Then entered the Lady Clarissa; but, for some good reason or other, it had been decided, between the knight and herself that she should enter alone: and from a most poetical scream of terror, soon uttered by her ladyship, it became evident that a dragon or a cow,



The Accomplished Family.



or some other dreadful animal, had been pursuing her. Again and again, with most picturesque effect, she looked behind her towards the blue silk *coulisses*, from whence she had issued, till, at length, the feelings of the audience were worked up to a wonderful pitch, by her ejacuating—

“It comes! It comes!”

This was little Michael’s cue; and, as soon as the words were spoken, he entered from the opposite side, holding a ragged cap on high, and dressed, in all respects, precisely as he had been on the memorable night of Lady Clarissa’s vaccine adventure.

In dumb show the lady indicated the direction from whence the dreaded monster would approach; and the most energetic and unsparing action of the limbs and person secured the audience, as well as her deliverer, from any possible mistake on the subject. Michael, too, performed his part with great spirit, exaggerating, as he had been commanded, by every possible means, the manœuvres necessary for turning the front of a cow.

To this scene, too, the audience gave loud applause, and in the midst of it entered Sir Matthew, who was, of course, greeted by bravoes, “long drawn out,” till the ladies and

gentlemen having nearly deafened one another, ceased at last, and listened to the beautiful explanation which followed.

First the company were made to comprehend that the danger was over, for the well-taught Michael turned about, and manfully facing the audience, pronounced distinctly

“The beast is gone!”

Then Sir Matthew, after bowing respectfully to the lady, said,

“Permit me, madam, to express my joy,
That you’ve been saved by this good little boy.”

It was, however, uttered in an accent of such temperate and measured feeling, that not even Lady Dowling saw any thing very particular in it,—a precaution, by the way, which had been suggested by the gentleman during the frequent rehearsals.

Lady Clarissa’s acting then became animated indeed ; for the poet, following her instructions, had composed for her in smooth, yet startling rhymes, about thirty lines of the most fervent thanksgiving, in which, now laying one hand on the head of the ragged child, now clasping both together in the eagerness of her address to Sir Matthew, and now gracefully extending both arms towards the audience, as if to make them sharers in her generous emotions, she

produced an effect more easily imagined than described.

The speech which followed from Sir Matthew was very noble, and at once let the audience into all the secret purposes of his benevolent heart. The by-play of Michael during this scene had been prepared for him by his benefactor with particular care, but somehow or other the boy was not apt in catching the knight's idea : for instead of the tender but joyous smile with which he had been instructed to look up into the face of his munificent patron, his countenance expressed nothing but terror.

"That little fellow does not look happy, Martha," whispered Miss Brotherton.

"Oh, no ! he looks very frightened," replied Martha, "but that is very natural, is it not, considering the novelty of his situation?"

"I don't know," said the heiress.

The piece went on to exhibit the beautiful manner in which this adoption of a ragged factory-boy into the bosom of the Dowling family had been hailed by all of them as an especial grace from heaven, on account of the opportunity it afforded for relieving the overflowing generosity of their hearts. Sir Matthew, while looking round upon his sixteen full-dressed offspring, who were now again

skilfully grouped upon the stage, was made to exclaim with clasped hands, and an almost sobbing excess of emotion,

"The widow and the orphan are more dear
To their young hearts than million pounds a year!"

Every body was touched, and again the applause was deafening.

Then came a very striking scene indeed. Michael appeared superbly dressed, and on each side of him was a middling-sized Miss Dowling, holding lightly and gracefully each a little basket, from under the covers of which peeped out grapes and peaches on the one side, and something that had the semblance of a flask of wine on the other.

Then spoke the fair-haired Louisa,

"Dear little boy, this basket's all your own,
'Tis to reward the courage you have shown."

And then Miss Charlotte,

"So is this too, my pretty little boy;
We hope 'twill give your poor old mother joy."

And when Michael, having received a basket in each hand, appeared preparing to depart, the two young ladies exclaimed together,

"'Tis papa sends it, who's so very kind:
How to do good is all he seeks to find!"

Upon this, Michael turned round again towards the audience, and stood stock still. It

was quite evident that he had some speech to make which he had apparently forgotten, for it was impossible for any child to look more completely distressed and at a loss.

At length it became pretty evident that, in lieu of all other performance, the poor boy was going to cry; and some ingenious persons doubted whether it might not be in his part to do so; but this idea was speedily removed by the very matter-of-fact pokes and nudges which the two young ladies bestowed upon him. In addition to this it seemed as if the little fellow caught some stimulating sounds from the *coulisses*, for he cast more than one furtive glance in that direction, and at length, with what was evidently a great effort, he stammered out,

“ My mother’s dear, and so’s my brother too,
But dearer still are your papa and you.
His charity’s so great, his heart so good,
He gives the naked clothes, the hungry food;
And I for—one—will—day—and night—in prayer,
Ask blessings—for—him—and—his—worth declare.”

The two last lines were so completely choked by the tears, which all his efforts could not suffice to restrain, that they were perfectly unintelligible to the audience.

“Is all that vehemence of weeping a part of Mr. Norval’s composition?” inquired Miss Brotherton in a whisper to Martha.

"Upon my word I don't know: but I should think not," was the reply.

"Martha!" said the heiress, very earnestly, "that child is suffering from an agony of terror."

"I should hope not," said Martha, in a voice that somewhat faltered.

"Do you know any thing about this boy?" pursued Miss Brotherton, continuing her whispering. "Do you know anything about the mother he talks of?"

"Nothing whatever, Miss Brotherton?"

"Do you feel quite satisfied, my dear, that this romantic adventure has been, or will be, advantageous to him?"

"I think," replied Martha, "that one can hardly doubt his being better off here than in the poverty of his mother's dwelling. You saw, Miss Brotherton, what a ragged condition the clothes were in which he had worn before."

"Decent clothes are a comfort, my dear Martha, there can be no doubt of it; but compared with the other circumstances which influence the happiness of life, they are of no great importance. Of course I suppose that your father means to educate him. Do you know whether he can read his bible yet?"

"I know that he could not," replied Martha, "when he came here."

"Poor little wretch! That is very terrible neglect somewhere. What sort of person is the mother?"

"By Michael's account," replied Martha, smiling, "she is a very estimable person indeed; but it certainly seems that she has not taken much pains with his education, poor little fellow!"

"What a sad thing it is," continued Miss Brotherton, "that we all of us know so little of the poor people employed in the factories! I believe they are said to be exceedingly well paid, but still I don't think it is quite right for the rich people in a neighbourhood to take no notice whatever of the poor. I know it is not so in other places; for I have heard my school-fellows continually talk of their fathers' tenants and work-people, and of their schools, and their clothing societies, and all sorts of things, and I have been trying to do a little good just at home with the families of some of the work-people about the place. But I have just now got my head strangely full of these factory folks. I wish you could give me some information about them, Martha."

"Indeed, my dear Miss Brotherton, I know

as little as you do. I am told that they are very good-for-nothing, that they receive enormous sums annually in wages, and yet that they are never contented, but for ever complaining, just because they have work to do for what they get ; and yet papa says that it is the very prettiest, lightest work in the world. And indeed I am afraid it is but too true, for this little fellow, though he is so interesting and intelligent that it is impossible to help liking him, always speaks of the factory as if he hated it."

" And if he does hate it, Martha, why, if you question him, should he conceal it ?"

" But I never have questioned him about that ; I should not think it right to do so. Only I remember his making me laugh, just after he came here, by saying something exceedingly *naïve* about their all liking wages but not work. Now, though I am not very deep in political economy, it is impossible not to see that poor people must work for what they get—don't you think so ?"

" Assuredly, and rich people too. I have no doubt that both your father and my father had to work very hard for the fortunes which have rewarded their industry. In our class of life this is necessary. But that does not settle

the question that is working in my head at present, and which, to tell you the truth, will not let me sleep by night nor amuse myself by day. How comes it that ALL the people—the only phrases I have heard upon the subject were very comprehensive—how comes it, Martha Dowling, that ALL the people, young and old, who work in the factories, are classed as ignorant and depraved?”

“ My dear Miss Brotherton, how is it possible that I should be able to answer you?”

“ Have you not heard the same statement, Martha?”

“ Oh, yes! very often. I know mamma says that nothing in the world should induce her to take a girl who had worked in the factories into the house, even in the very lowest situation. Oh, I believe they are very bad!”

“ Very bad? But, good gracious! why are they very bad? What is the cause of this strange degradation of one peculiar class of human beings? It surely cannot arise from the nature of their employment; for if it did, of course the clergy of the neighbourhood would interfere to stop it. It is quite out of the question to suppose that in a Christian country many hundreds—nay, thousands—Mrs. Tremlett tells me there are many thou-

sands employed in the factories—it is impossible to suppose, is it not, that any labour or occupation could be permitted, which by its nature, and of necessity, tended to corrupt the morals of those employed in it? There must be some other cause for their wickedness, if wicked they are.”

“ Oh! they *are* very wicked, I am quite sure of that; for I have heard it again and again ever since I was born, and you know I have not been away like you, Miss Brotherton, always in London. I have never lived anywhere but here, and I never remember the time when I did not hear that the factory people were the very wickedest set of wretches in the world.”

For a few minutes Miss Brotherton was silent, and even seemed to have restored her attention to the silly business of the gaudy stage, for her eyes were fixed in that direction; but she presently gave evidence that wherever her eyes had been, her thoughts had not wandered from the subject to which she appeared so earnestly to have devoted them. For she said in the low, slow, even tone which denotes concentrated feeling—

“ If this be so, Miss Martha Dowling, if thousands of human beings in a Christian country are stigmatized as wicked, because

their destiny has placed them in a peculiar employment, that employment ought to be swept for ever and for ever from the land, though the wealth that flowed from it outweighed the treasures of Mexico."

Martha Dowling started, but said not a word in reply; there was something in the manner of her neighbour which awed her. True, genuine, deep feeling is always sublime, be it manifested by such a young girl as Mary Brotherton, or such an old king as Lear. But, though Martha was silent, her companion suffered not the conversation to drop; and presently resumed in a tone of less exaltation,—
"Do you think, my dear, that I could get hold of your little Michael some day, so that I might have a little conversation with him?"

"Yes, certainly, Miss Brotherton," replied Martha, "I think papa would be quite pleased, for he seems to like nothing better than seeing every body take notice of him."

"Do you think your father loves the little boy, Martha?"

"I am sure he is very kind to him," replied the conscious daughter, a little piqued. "For it can be nothing but kindness that makes him take the child into the house, and feed him and clothe him for nothing."

"And, of course, Martha, he will get some instruction here?"

"Oh! he has begun to read the bible already," replied the kind-hearted girl, eagerly. "I have undertaken that business myself. The poor little fellow seemed to suffer so, when he was learning his part. I never saw a child appear so heartily ashamed of any thing."

"One almost wonders at that too; brought up, as he must have been, in the very lap of ignorance. I should have thought, after all I have heard, that he would have been ashamed of nothing. However, I should like to talk to him. At what hour do you give him his reading lesson, Martha?"

"When I can catch him," replied the young lady, laughing. "You have no idea, Miss Brotherton, how much the little gentleman is engaged. Papa has taken him about with him in the carriage, almost everywhere, and such quantities of people have been to see him!"

"And does he seem greatly delighted with it all?"

"No, I don't think he does. He seems to me to care for nothing in the world but his mother, and a little crippled brother that he talks of."

"That does not look as if he were tho-

roughly confirmed in wickedness as yet," observed the heiress.

"No, indeed! It is his affectionate temper that has made me take to him: for I do believe he is very idle, and hates his work, just as papa says they all do," answered Martha.

"Does he visit his mother every day?"

"He either goes or sends to her, I believe. Papa makes a great point of something very nice being taken down to Ashleigh every day for Michael's sick mother to eat; and the child always carries it himself, when papa does not send him elsewhere."

"And at what hour does he generally go?"

"Always after luncheon."

"Don't you think the play must be almost come to an end, Martha?" said Miss Brother-ton, after looking again on the stage for a few minutes, and yawning rather more conspicuously than politeness could warrant.

"I should think it must," replied Martha, catching and returning the yawn.

There was, however, a good deal to be done. There was a figure dance to be performed, and a trio to be played on the pianoforte, harp, and violoncello, by the two eldest Miss Dowlings and their music-master.

This last was a very long business; and the

heiress, who, instead of having been instructed to endure annoyances patiently, had been rather taught never to endure them at all, got up in the middle of it, and telling Martha that her head ached too much to permit her remaining any longer, made her way out of the room, which she effected the more easily from having taken her station near a side door, which led from the theatre (in ordinary phrase the school-room) into the private apartments of Mademoiselle Beaujoie.

Martha Dowling, of course, followed her, and expressed much concern for her malady, offering all the specifics usually suggested by one lady to another, under such circumstances. "No, thank you," was the reply she received to all, "I only want to get away."

"But it will not be very easy to do so, this way," replied Martha, "unless you will condescend to go through the passage that leads from the offices."

"Never fear, dear Martha," returned the self-willed young lady, "I will condescend to go through any passage that will lead to fresh air, for indeed that place was too hot!"

The room they first entered on passing through the door was one dedicated to the reception of globes, slates, guitars, dumb-bells,

dictionaries, embroidering-frames, and sundry other miscellanies connected with an enlarged system of education. Beyond this was the bed-chamber of Mademoiselle, which again led to an apartment opening upon that part of the school-room now occupied as the stage. This room, which was denominated Mademoiselle Beaujoie's parlour, was now converted into a general green-room and dressing-room, for into this all exits from the stage were made.

While still in the bed-room, Miss Brotherton, and her more than half-frightened companion, heard voices speaking in no very pleasant accents from this theatrical retreat, and the angry tones of Sir Matthew Dowling himself were soon unmistakably audible.

"Let us go back, pray let us go back!" said the greatly distressed Martha, in a whisper.

"I am too ill, my dear, to bear that room again," re-whispered Miss Brotherton. "Let me sit down here for a few minutes, and I shall recover myself; and then we can return, and go out the other way with the rest of the company."

It was impossible to argue the point; so poor Martha submitted, though cruelly distressed at the idea of her father's private vio-

lence of temper being listened to by one of those who had never seen Dowling Lodge, or its inhabitants, excepting in full dress. This distress was by no means lessened when some very audible words made it evident that Michael Armstrong was the object of the angry feelings to which he was now giving vent. As the best thing to be done under the circumstances, she pointed to a sofa at the greatest distance from the imperfectly-closed door from whence the sounds issued; but Miss Brotherton had already dropped into a chair so near this door of communication, that she not only heard, but saw all that was passing in that part of the green-room which Sir Matthew Dowling occupied. That this was the last place in which a gentlewoman would have been likely to place herself at such a moment is most certain; but the capricious heiress was wont to exclaim on many occasions, when observance and restraint were irksome to her, "I am not a gentlewoman—and why should I torment myself by affecting to be one."

It was probably by some such reasoning that she now justified to herself the strong measure she was adopting; in order to become acquainted with what was passing *behind the scenes* respecting Michael Armstrong.

Circumstances were favourable to the object; for Sir Matthew was in one of those towering fits of passion, to which his family and dependants knew him to be subject, though the majority of the world declared him to be an extremely good-natured man.

“Blackguard!—Vermin!—Devil’s imp!”—were among the first intelligible words which reached the heiress, after she had seated herself; and these were accompanied by cuffs so heavy on the head and shoulders of Michael, that it required a very powerful effort over herself to prevent her darting forward to seize the arm that gave them. But this prudent effort was dictated and sustained by a stronger feeling than curiosity; and she remained perfectly still to await what should follow.

Dr. Crockley, who, though not among the corps of performers, had been permitted to be useful behind the scenes in a variety of ways, and, among the rest, had acted as prompter, stood beside the trembling child, and it was to his friendly ear that the irritated Sir Matthew addressed himself.

“Will you believe he did not do it on purpose? Will you believe, Crockley, that there was anything to make him cry then? Had we not borne with all his beastly stupidity, ex-

pressly for the purpose of keeping the little ungrateful monster in good humour? Hadn't I fed him, and crammed him, as you bid me, with what was too good for him ever to have reached the smell of? Didn't I cosset his lazy beast of a mother with such niceties as the dirty beggar never heard of before? And his crook-shanked rat of a brother, too, haven't they been all fed at my cost for more than a month past? And then to see this black-hearted traitor come upon the stage, and cry before all the company as if his heart was breaking!"

"It's too bad to bear," replied Dr. Crockley, "and if he was to be flayed alive, and salted, it would not be half what he deserved."

"Wouldn't the best thing I could do be to send him back into the factory to-morrow morning, Doctor?" demanded Sir Matthew, suddenly quitting his hold of the child, and setting his square arms akimbo. "By the living God! I am sick of the job."

"I will be very good, sir, if you will," said the boy, "and I won't go to sleep at the work at all, and no more won't Edward neither, if you will but please to let me go back again."

"You see how much he dreads the factory," said Sir Matthew, with a grim smile. "But,"

nodding his head, and winking his eye familiarly to the child, "we shall see, my pretty dear, if Mr. Parsons can't contrive to do something more than just keep you awake. He *shall* go back, Crockley, upon my soul he shall. It is the only way to prevent his driving me mad. I loathe the very sight of him."

"You must do as you like, Sir Matthew," replied his confidential friend, "but it will be the most d—d foolish thing you ever contrived in your life, if you do. I tell you the story is doing wonders everywhere; and now, because a stupid brat can't say his lesson perfect, you are just going to spoil it all."

"His lesson perfect! Confound the sly vagabond, that was not the point, Crockley. It was not the *lesson* that choked him. How much will you bet me, that if I get fifty lines written down, abusing me, and nothing else in 'em, he won't learn them off as glib and perfect as any actor on the stage? I know his black heart, and he shall find out that mine is not made of pap before I have done with him."

"That's all right and fair enough, and I have nothing to say against it," replied the friendly physician, "and let us talk it all over quietly together, to-morrow morning; but for

to-night—" And here Dr. Crockley, taking his friend by the arm, led him to the door which opened upon the stage, from whence issued a *tintamarre* of instruments sufficient to cover whatever he might wish to say, not only from the ear of little Michael, but from all others. The moment selected by the angry knight for relieving himself of the wrath which burned within him would have been a most favourable one, but for the accidental vicinity of Miss Brotherton. While the whole corps of performers, excepting the manufacturer and the factory-boy, were grouped upon the stage, in a style the most favourable for the display of their persons and dresses, the trio above-mentioned, augmented, by way of finale, by tambourines and triangles, went steadily on in a *crescendo* movement that ended in a clamour, rendered perfect by the last peal of applause from the well-nigh worn-out audience, so that their secret conference was not otherwise likely to be overheard.

At the moment after Sir Matthew had declared his intention of teaching Michael to know what his heart was made of, and just as he was himself led off by his friend Crockley, Miss Brotherton, pressing her two hands strongly upon her breast, involuntarily pro-

nounced the word "MONSTER!" and then placing her hands before her eyes remained lost in no very pleasing reverie. But hardly had her meditations lasted a moment, ere they were chased by hearing the sound of some one falling near her, and looking round, she perceived poor Martha stretched insensible upon the floor.

Inexpressibly shocked at remembering, which she did by no slow action of the mind, the suffering to which her own unscrupulous curiosity had exposed the unfortunate girl, she ran to her with eager haste, and with much repentant tenderness raised her head and did all her small experience suggested towards restoring her. The comfortable insensibility did not last long; and Martha, who with restored animation immediately recovered her recollection, and in whose composition no affectation of any kind had part, raised herself without assistance from the ground, and silently placed herself upon a sofa.

"Dear excellent Martha!" exclaimed Miss Brotherton, with much true feeling, "fear not that I should ever repeat what I have so accidentally heard; and let not your good and dutiful nature suffer thus, because I *have* heard it. We have all our faults, Martha, and it is

the duty of each to pray for the conversion of their own hearts first, and then for the repentance of others. And what prayers, dear girl, so likely to be heard as those of a good and dutiful child? Let us slip back to our places, Martha. This clapping of hands announces, as I take it, the conclusion of the piece."

Martha, though wounded to the very soul, uttered no word of deprecation or complaint, but there was an unsophisticated simplicity of character about her which made her decline, by a courtesy that had a little of the stiffness of ceremony in it, the offered arm of Mary, and stepping forward she opened the door by which they had left the theatre, till the heiress had passed through it, and resumed her place.

CHAPTER XI.

Miss Brotherton pushes her inquiries further—A well-arranged scheme disagreeably defeated—A visit, and its consequences.

MARY BROTHERTON certainly did not return home that night with any doubts on her mind respecting the nature of Sir Matthew Dowling's benevolence; but the fever of spirits which had seized her was greatly increased by the information she had gained.

There was a vast deal of energy and strength of purpose in the mind of Mary Brotherton, but hitherto all this had lain latent and inert. The sentiment which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred is the first to awaken the female heart to strong emotion seemed to be totally powerless to her. She had never yet felt the slightest approach to the passion of love; nor was it very likely she should, for one among her many peculiarities of character was the persuasion that every man who paid her attention was in pursuit of her fortune, an idea which, to such a temper as hers, was calculated

to act as a sevenfold shield against all amatory attacks upon her heart.

Most truly therefore, up to this time, had she continued

“ In maiden meditation, fancy free.”

But this could be said no longer ; neither fancy nor any other faculty could be termed free in one whose thoughts fixed themselves by night and day upon one single subject, while feeling that to it she was ready to sacrifice every thing else in life.

On re-entering her house on the memorable night of the Dowling Lodge theatricals, Miss Brotherton retired to her apartment without even the intention of sleeping. She laid her head upon her pillow deliberately determined not to close her eyes in sleep till she had made up her mind as to the best way of rescuing the pale trembling child, whose voice and form haunted her, from the horrible bondage of Sir Matthew Dowling's charity.

The question was not altogether an easy one. She could hardly doubt that very strong indignation would follow any open effort on her part to interfere with a child publicly held up as the favoured object of Sir Matthew's loudly-vaunted benevolence, and moreover,

privately marked out by his vindictive nature as a victim to his hatred.

Whether as a rival in his munificence, or a champion against his hate, it was pretty certain that her interference would render her obnoxious to her pompous neighbour's displeasure, and this she had no inclination to encounter if she could help it. For though at this moment she felt within her a strength and firmness of purpose not easily shaken, the poor girl knew that she stood alone in the world, with no friend to support her more powerful than nurse Tremlett, and nothing but her two hundred thousand pounds' worth of this world's trumpery to enable her to have her way, and her will, in many matters that she feared might turn out rather difficult to manage.

So she determined to avoid quarrelling with Sir Matthew Dowling as long as she could, and though the image of Michael struggling with his tears, and the plaintive sound of his voice as he pleaded for leave to labour again, absolutely haunted her memory, she determined upon being cautious, wise, and very deliberative in any measures she might eventually take to ensure his release.

Under the influence of these prudentia resolutions, Miss Brotherton for the presen

abandoned her purpose of seeking a conversation with the child himself, and determined to find her way to the cottage of his mother instead. Yet even this she felt must be done with caution. Her carriage and her liveries were about as splendid and conspicuous as carriage and liveries could be, and though she knew not precisely in what direction the widow Armstrong might be found, it was easy enough to guess, that did she make use of her ordinary mode of conveyance in reaching her abode, let it be where it might, she would attract more attention than she desired.

It was to Mrs. Tremlett that she determined to apply in this dilemma, and at their *tête-à-tête* breakfast on the following morning, she once more led the conversation to the factories.

"You must not scold me, dear friend," said she, "if you find that I have, as I told you I would, disobeyed your advice altogether, about thinking no more of the factory-people, for I cannot get them out of my head, nurse Tremlett."

"I am sorry for it, my dear," replied the good woman, gravely; "because I am quite sure that you will only vex yourself, and do no good."

"You ought to know me better by this time, Mrs. Tremlett, than to fancy that your manner

of speaking on this dark subject is the way to check my curiosity. It was pretty effectually awakened perhaps before; but had it been otherwise, what you say would be quite enough to set me upon inquiring into it. Nurse Tremlett, I WILL know everything that the most persevering inquiry can teach me respecting the people to whose labours all the rich people in this neighbourhood owe their wealth, and myself among the rest. And when I tell you that at the present moment this is the only subject upon which I feel any real interest, I think you are too wise to attempt turning me from it, by saying, ‘ My dear, you will only vex yourself.’ ”

“ I do indeed, my child, know you too well to fancy that, if you have set your mind upon it, you will give it up; so I have nothing more to say, Miss Mary.”

“ Well then, my dear woman,” replied Mary, taking her hand, “ if, through all the years we have passed together, I have shown such a determined spirit for no reason in the world but only to get my own wanton silly will, do me the justice to anticipate that I shall not be less obstinate in this one thing, that I believe to be right, than in all the many wherein it was most likely I suspected myself to be wrong.

I do believe, nurse Tremlett, that it is my duty to understand this matter better than I do; and, if this be so, I will trust to God to make up to me for all the *vexation* your prophecy threatens it will bring."

"If that is the way you think of it, my dear child, Heaven forbid that I should seek to hinder you. But rich as you are, dear Mary, if you was to give it all, and ten thousand times as much besides, what good could it do? The mills would go on just the same, you know."

"I don't want to stop the mills, nurse Tremlett. Why should I? Industry, ingenuity, science, enterprise, must of course be all brought into action by this flourishing cotton-trade, and, beyond all doubt, it would be equally wicked and wild to wish its destruction. That is not the notion I have got hold of, good nurse—very, very far from it, I assure you. What I want to find out is, whether, by the nature of things, it is impossible to manufacture worsted and cotton wool into articles useful to man, without rendering those employed upon it unfit to associate with the rest of their fellow-creatures? This seems to me so gross an absurdity, that I cannot give faith to it; and therefore I suspect that the depravity and wickedness you and Miss Martha Dowling talk

about, must arise from these people having too much money at their command. This, perhaps, may lead to intemperance and extravagance. Don't you think this may be the case, Mrs. Tremlett!"

"Good gracious, no, Miss Mary! Why, they are all the very poorest starving wretches upon earth."

"But they may be poor because they are extravagant, nurse. They must get a most monstrous quantity of money, for though none of the gentlemen ever talk much of their factories, I have repeatedly heard allusion made to the enormous sums paid every week to the work-people. And it is quite clear that all the families must get a great deal, because all the little children work, which can hardly be the case elsewhere. Now, I cannot help thinking, nurse, that a great deal of good might be done by teaching them a little economy, and inducing them to lay by their superfluous money in a savings-bank. That is one great reason why I want to get acquainted with the people themselves. Now, for instance, that poor sick widow Armstrong—the mother of the little boy that Sir Matthew Dowling has taken—I am quite sure she can have no wicked-

ness to hurt me; and I am determined, nurse, to go and call upon her."

"Well, my dear, that can't do no great harm, certainly; and, if you like it, I can go in the carriage with you."

"Most certainly I should like you to go with me, but not in the carriage, Mrs. Tremlett. I don't want to have all the people in her neighbourhood staring at me, or at her either; and that they would be sure to do if we went in the carriage. I mean to walk, nurse."

"Do you know where the woman lives, my dear?"

"No; I must leave you to find that out."

"What is her name, Miss Mary?"

"Armstrong. She is a widow, and lives somewhere in Ashleigh. Let us walk into the garden, and while I am looking after my seedlings, you can inquire of one of the under-gardeners, or the boy. And if you manage the matter well, the next prime blossom that I get from my experiment-bed shall be called the Tremlett geranium."

* * * * *

While this conversation was going on at Millford Park, the residence of Miss Brotherton, Dr. Crockley arrived to enjoy a *tête-à-tête*

tête breakfast with Sir Matthew in "*the study*" at Dowling Lodge. This room, though not so splendid as some of its neighbours under the same roof, could, nevertheless, be made very snug and comfortable upon occasion, and an excellent breakfast was spread before them; while the two gentlemen sat in judgment upon little Michael's contumacy, and consulted on the best method of bringing him into better order.

"Confound the imp!" exclaimed Sir Matthew, as he selected his favourite dainties, "is it not provoking, Crockley, that I should have taken such an aversion to him? Upon my soul, I never hated anything so much in my life. In the first place it is disgusting to see him dressed up, walking about the house like a tame monkey, when I know that his long fingers might be piecing thousands of threads for two shillings a-week; and it is neither more nor less than loathsome to see him eat, at luncheon, sometimes when we have had him in before company, exactly the very same things that my children eat themselves; and then, upon the back of it all, to know that the ungrateful little viper hates the very sight of me. I don't believe, Crockley, that any good can come of all this, equal to what it makes me suffer in the doing. It is perfectly unnatural

to see him close within an inch of my own legs. I'd rather have a tame toad crawling about by half. I must give it up, Crockley—I must, upon my soul.”

“ You are the master, Sir Matthew. I can't stop you, if do it you will ; but I can tell you this, I have been calling at fifty different houses, at the very least, since this job began, and I pledge you my sacred honour that in every one of them the only thing talked of was your benevolence and generosity. ‘ Such an example ! ’ cried one ; ‘ So heavenly-minded ! ’ said another ; ‘ It is enough to bring a blessing upon the whole country,’ whined a third ; and ‘ It is to be hoped that such goodness will be rewarded in this world and the next,’ observed a fourth. Think, Sir Matthew, how all this will tell against the grumblings about Miss Nance Stephens and her sudden demise.”

“ That's true—devilish true, Crockley—and yet it's no cure for my being sick at the stomach every time I see him.”

“ I don't know about that ; I should think it was, or, at any rate, if you'll only bear it a little longer, I should not be at all surprised if you were to be relieved by some other great capitalist setting up in the same way ; and as your name has been sung out, that would do

just as well. Upon my soul, I'm in earnest; I should not the least wonder if, before the end of three months, every one of your first-rates were to have a tame factory-child in their houses, to act like the hedgehogs we get to eat black-beetles for us. And they'll do their work well too, Sir Matthew: all the nasty, creeping, multiplying plagues, in the shape of evil tales against the factory system, would be swallowed up by the clearing-off effects of these nice little hedgehog gentry."

"You are as keen as your own lancet, Crockley; and I never turn a deaf ear to anything you say. But it's monstrous hard though that I can't walk about my own house without running the risk of seeing this odious little grub. By the way, Crockley, why could not my lady take a factory-girl in by way of charity? Some of the little wenches are sightly enough before they have worked down their flesh too far; and, though I can't say I am particularly tender over the lanky idiot-looking slatterns that we mostly get at the mill, I'll bet what you please that I should never hate the sight of a girl as I do the sight of this boy."

"Very likely not, Sir Matthew," replied the doctor, laughing immoderately: "But what would my lady say? And what would all the

other ladies say? No, no, leave that alone, and make up your mind to let the boy have the run of the house for a month or two; after which you may send him to the devil if you will, for the good will be done, and the boy himself forgotten."

"That's all vastly easy for you to lay down, chapter and verse, wise man that you are," replied the knight: "but if I tell all, I can let you into a secret, Crockley, that would make you change your mind, perhaps. The long and the short of it is, that I can't keep my hands off him, and if the young black-hearted scamp—I know he is black-hearted, I'm quite sure of it on account of a look he has got with his eyes, that makes one always feel so uncomfortable—if he were to take it into his vile ungrateful head to go about the country telling everything that I may have happened to say and do to him, when his nasty ways have pushed me further than I could bear, I don't think the history of the charity job *would* do much good, doctor."

Doctor Crockley gave a long, low whistle; and then, after a minute of meditation, said, 'That's a bore.'

"I know it is," sharply responded his patron, 'a devilish bore. But you don't suppose that

I am to stand bursting with rage, and not take the liberty of speaking my mind to a factory grub, do you?"

"Heaven forbid! A whole factory full of wenches may all drop down dead, I hope, before it comes to that," replied his friend. "But what you have stated is worth attention, Sir Matthew. I don't like the notion of that child's having tales to tell. It spoils all."

"I know it," returned the vexed knight. "Martha told me just now, not ten minutes before you came, that Miss Brotherton said she should like very much to talk to the boy: she is as sharp as a needle, you know, and I'll answer for it would find out all he has got to tell, and a devilish deal more, perhaps, in no time. Pretty work that would make! would it not? Augustus is sure of her, he tells me; and just fancy such a match as that spoiled by the forked tongue of this little viper! The very notion makes one mad."

"A cure must be found for that mischief, let it cost what it may," replied Crockley; "and for the future it might be better, perhaps, for your charity, Sir Matthew, to show itself some other way. You are too honest-hearted, that's the fact. A fine bold intellect, like yours, can't descend to the paltry patience

belonging to inferior minds. Is there no getting rid of the boy? No possibility of sending him 'prentice somewhere or other?"

"'Prentice?" said Sir Matthew, looking with a very singular expression into the face of his friend: "'Prentice?" he repeated, and stretching out his hand, he seized upon that of Doctor Crockley, which he shook with extraordinary ardour. "Send him as a 'prentice! Upon my soul, Crockley, if you had laid down five hundred pounds upon the table, I should not have considered it as of one-half as much worth as that one word 'PRENTICE. Yes, by Jove! he shall be a 'prentice. Oaf that I was for not thinking of it before! You don't know half the good you have done me by that word. 'Tis but lately, my dear fellow, that you and I have come to understand one another thoroughly; and I have never yet talked to you about one or two points particularly interesting to all our capitalists. I never mentioned to you, did I, the Deep Valley Mills, not far from Appledown Cross, in Derbyshire?"

"Never, Sir Matthew, as far as I can recollect," was the reply.

"Well, then, I will tell you something about them now, that will make you perceive plainly enough what a capital good hit you have made

in talking of apprenticeship for my young darling. Deep Valley Mill, Crockley, is the property of my excellent friend, Elgood Sharpton. He is one of the men born to be the making of this country. A fine, manly, dauntless character, who would scorn to give up his notions before any Act of Parliament that ever was made. His idea is, Crockley,—and I should like to see the man who would venture to tell me that it was not a glorious one,—his idea is, that if we could get rid of our cursed corn-laws, the whole of the British dominions would soon be turned into one noble collection of workshops. I wish you could hear him talk; upon my soul, it's the finest thing I know. He says that if his system is carried out into full action, as I trust it will be one of these days, all the grass left in England will be the parks and paddocks of the capitalists. Sharpton will prove to you as clearly as that two and two make four, that the best thing for the country would be to scour it, from end to end, of those confounded idle drones, the landed gentry. They must go, sooner or later, he says, if the corn-laws are done away with. Then down goes the price of bread, and down goes the operatives' wages; and what will stop us then

doctor? Don't you see? Isn't it plain as the nose on your face that when the agricultural interest is fairly drummed out of the field, the day's our own? Who shall we have then spying after us, to find out how many hours a-day we choose to make our hands work? D'ye see, Crockley? If we choose to work the vitals out of them, who shall say we shan't?"

"I never heard a finer, clearer line of argument, in my life, Sir Matthew," replied the attentive listener. "That man, that Elgood Sharpton, seems born for a legislator. But I question not that when you two get together, you act like flint and steel upon one another. Is not that the case?"

"Pretty much, I believe," replied Sir Matthew; "and I promise you, Crockley, I give no bad proof of my confidence in your honour and friendship, by letting you into a few of our notions, for matters are by no means quite ripe for us to speak out, as yet. Our policy is, you must know, to give out that it is the operatives who are clamouring for the repeal of the corn-laws, whereas many among them, saucy rogues, are as deep as their betters, and know perfectly well, and be hanged to 'em, that our only reason for trying to make '*Down with the corn-laws!*' the popular cry, is, that we may whisper in their

ears, 'Down with the wages' afterwards. Ay, doctor, if we can but manage this, England will become the paradise of manufacturers!—the great workshop of the world! When strangers climb our chalk cliffs to get a peep at us, they shall see, land at what point they will, the glowing fires that keep our engines going, illuminating the land from one extremity of the island to the other! Then think how we shall suck in—that is, we the capitalists, my man—think how we shall suck in gold, gold, gold from all sides. The idea is perfectly magnificent! The fat Flemings must give up all hopes of ever getting their finical flax to vie with our cotton again!—Crockley," but here Sir Matthew paused for a moment, as if half doubtful whether he should go on. The confidential impulse within him, however, worked so strongly in favour of the friendly, smiling physician, that all reserve gave way, and, winking his eye at him with a truly comic expression, he proceeded—"Crockley, they don't understand spinning in Flanders: they don't know yet how many baby sinews must be dragged and drawn out to mix, as it were, with the thread, before the work can be made to answer. No, no, we have fairly given Master Fleming the go-by in his own trade, so for the future he

must be pleased to go on hand-digging, and sowing every inch of his dung-muxen, till it teems with corn for exportation. That's what he's fit for; whereas science has put us rather in advance of all that, my good doctor. Our friends in Poland, too, shall plough away to the same tune, and Russia, from end to end, will become one huge granary at our service. Where will your aristocratic landholders be then, Crockley? Perhaps you can't tell? but I suspect I can. They'll just be in the factories, sir. Your manors and your preserves (we can get game enough from abroad),—your manors and your preserves will be covered with factories, except just here and there, you know, where we capitalists may have taken a fancy to my Lord This-thing's grounds, or the Duke of T'other-thing's mansion, for our own residences. And this I maintain is just as it should be; and the reason why is plain. We have got before all the world in machinery, and so all the world must be content to walk behind us. By Jove, if I had my way, Crockley, I'd turn France and the Rhine into a wine-cellar, Russia into a corn-bin, and America, glorious America, north, south, east, and west, into a cotton plantation. Then should we not flourish? Then should we not bring down the rascals to

work at our own prices, and be thankful too ? What's to stop us ? Trust me there is not a finer humbug going, than just making the country believe that the operatives are rampant for the repeal of the corn-laws."

"It is a treat to hear you, Sir Mathew. I should be at a loss to name any man that I thought your equal in the gift of eloquence. But, nevertheless, we must not forget business—we must not forget Michael Armstrong, Sir Matthew."

"No, no, my good friend, we will not forget him. Be patient for a moment, and I will make you understand how my friend Elgood Sharpton and my darling *protégé* have been mixed up in my mind together. Sharpton's factory at Deep Valley is one of the most perfect institutions, I take it, that the ingenuity of man ever produced. It is perfect, sir,—just perfect. In the first place it is built in a wild, desolate spot, where the chances are about ten thousand to one against any of the travelling torments who take upon themselves to meddle and make about what does not concern them—it is a hundred thousand to one against their ever catching sight of it. You never saw such a place in your life, Crockley. 'Tis such a hole that I don't believe the sunshine was ever known to get to the bottom of it. It was made

on purpose, you may depend upon it. Well sir, Sharpton,—who whatever he undertakes is sure to get over the ground faster than any other man, for he never lets anything stop him, Sharpton felt quite convinced, you see, that the only way to carry on the work to any good purpose was to UNDERSELL. And how was this to be done without loss instead of gain? That's a question I promise you that has puzzled many a man that was no fool—but, egad, it did not puzzle him. He knew well enough that it was not the material—that came cheap enough—nor yet the machinery, though Heaven knows that's dear enough; but 'tis the labour, sir, the damnation wages going on, on, on, for evermore that drains the money away. And what then does he do, but hit at once upon the very perfectest scheme that ever entered a man's head to lesson that ruinous burden. He knew well enough, for he has a most unaccountable deal of general information, that there were lots of parishes in England that didn't know what on earth to do with their pauper brats. There's many, you know, that say this one thing, this nasty filthy excess of pauper population is the very mischief that is eating up the country, and destroying our prosperity. But who's the greatest political economist, Crockley, the man who talks of the

evil, or he who sets about finding a remedy ? The political economists of the nineteenth century ought to erect a statue to Elgood Sharpton ; and so they will, I have no doubt, when the subject comes to be more perfectly understood. For just mark what he has done. First he finds out this capital spot for the job, and builds a factory there ; next he either goes himself, or sends agents, good, capable, understanding men, to all the parishes that he finds are overburdened with poor. Then, sir, he enters philosophically into the subject with the parish authorities, but of course with proper discretion, and proves to them that in no way could they do their duty by their parish children, particularly the orphans, or those whose parents don't trouble them, so well as by apprenticing them to a good trade."

Here Sir Matthew paused, and a merry glance was exchanged between him and his companion.

" Well, Crockley, it is a good trade, you know, a devilish good trade, isn't it ? At any rate I promise you that so many parishes felt convinced of it, that Elgood Sharpton had soon got Deep Valley Factory as full of young hands as it could cram. Now it is since that, you must know, that old Sir Robert took it

into his head that little children must not be overworked. He it was, I believe, that first set up that nonsensical cry to any purpose; and, to be sure, nothing ever was so absurd in a country where everybody knows that if the young pauper spawn could but be made to die off, every thing would go on well. Is it not strange, now, that old Peel could not be contented to grow rich, and hold his tongue? But no, he got bit by some poisonous humanity-notion or other, and a devilish shake he gave to the system just at first, by his absurd bill for the protection of infant paupers; but such men as Sharpton are not to be knocked down like ninepins either by law-makers or law; and, to say the truth, old Sir Robert Peel's bill was, to all intents and purposes, a dead letter within two years after it was passed. Bless your soul, it was the easiest thing in the world to keep the creatures so ignorant about the bill, after the first talk was over, that they might have been made to believe anything, and to submit to anything. In fact the question for them always lies in an egg-shell. They must do what the masters would have them, OR STARVE. That fact is worth all the bills that ever were passed; and another thing is, that as long as there's nothing to prevent

our own friends and relations from being among the magistrates, even if complaints are made, we can manage them."

"How true it is, Sir Matthew, that there is no inequality of accidental condition that can equal the inequality produced by a decided superiority in the intellectual powers," said Dr. Crockley. "At this moment I give you my sacred honour that I look upon you, and your friend Mr. Elgood Sharpton also, as standing in a much more commanding position than any duke in the country. What's a long descent compared to a long head, Sir Matthew? I'll tell you what the difference is. A long descent pretty generally helps a man to empty his purse, whereas a long head will never fail to help him fill it. It is as clear to me as that the sun's in heaven, Sir Matthew, that the game is in your own hands. I know—for I have made some curious experiments that way—I know what a dog may be taught to do by hunger, and you may rely upon it that it is just as powerful in a man. Egad, Sir Matthew, it is a very fine subject for scientific experiments. It is difficult to say how far it might go. If a dog, for example, may be taught tricks by hunger, that approach in ingenuity to the powers of man,

why may not man, skilfully acted upon by the same principle, be brought to rival the docility of-a dog?"

"I see nothing in nature to stop it, doctor," replied Sir Matthew, with an air of great animation. "But remember, my dear Crockley, this is not a point to be touched upon in the book we were talking of. The public, you know, can have nothing on earth to do with the private regulation of our affairs. People have just as much right to inquire at what o'clock my lord duke expects his valet to get up, and moreover what the valet eats for breakfast when he is up, as they have to know what hours our hired labourers keep, and what they feed upon. It is a gross inquisitorial interference, Crockley, and ought not to be thought of in a free country."

"That's a first-rate idea though, Sir Matthew," said the doctor, taking out his pocket-book and pencil. "I must book that. It is turning the parliament into an office of the inquisition. The canters may call it a *holy office*, if they will, but the British people will never bear the notion of AN INQUISITION. That's a capital idea, I promise you. As to my parallel, you know, between a dog and a man, it is merely between ourselves, or such

an out-and-out friend as Mr. Sharpton, and it may be worth thinking about, perhaps, practically and scientifically, I mean ; but certainly I should never dream of printing it. A hundred years hence human intelligence may have reached such a point of improvement that the plain good sense and practical utility of the idea may make it properly appreciated. But as yet we are not sufficiently advanced in the science emphatically denominated '*the positive*,' in contradistinction to '*the ideal*.' It will come though, if we do but go on in the path we are in. But we are generalizing too much, Sir Matthew ; nevertheless I suspect I have caught your idea. You have thought of sending your young favourite to Deep Valley Mill by way of putting the finishing stroke to your benevolent project in his favour ?"

" Exactly so, my dear friend. But we must have indentures, observe ; and there is some little difficulty in that."

" I suppose you know best, Sir Matthew, else I should say that indentures cannot be necessary. From your description, the locality of this factory, with its romantic name, must be like the valley of Rasselas, at least in one particular—namely, that without wings the happy dwellers there would find it impossible to escape," replied the doctor.

“ Difficult, exceedingly difficult, certainly, but not quite impossible; for without indentures a runaway could not be legally pursued. And to tell you the truth, friend Crockley, I should not much approve giving a subject for a second part of Mr. Osmond Norval’s drama, in which the hero should appear upon the scene after a few months’ residence in Deep Valley Mills.”

“ That’s true. But I don’t see under what pretence you are to get the brat apprenticed to your friend Sharpton,” remarked the cautious counsellor.

“ If he is apprenticed to me, it will do just as well,” replied the knight, “ for I could make over the indentures to Sharpton easy enough; but it strikes me I might have some difficulty in making the mother consent to it.”

“ Not if you will be upon your P’s and Q’s, sir knight,” said his friend: “ you have nothing to do but go on sending tit-bits to the sick woman and the rickety boy that you mentioned, and when they have got a little used to it she’ll not choose to affront her *generous benefactor*. Remember the dog theory, Sir Matthew; they are all alike.”

“ I dare say you are right. But, at any rate, I had better keep out of that hateful brat’s way, or rather take care that he keeps

out of mine. But I shall bear the sight of him better if I make up my mind to send him to Deep Valley. That will wipe out old scores between us."

Having said this, Sir Matthew rose from the breakfast-table, seeming thereby to indicate that the consultation was at an end. Dr. Crockley rose too; but though he took up his hat and his riding-whip from the chair, on which he had placed them, he lingered as if he had still something to say before he took his leave.

Sir Matthew, however, seemed to take no notice of the hint, but stretching out his hand said decidedly, "Good morning, doctor, good morning. Let us see you again soon."

Dr. Crockley upon this stretched out his hand too, but instead of clutching that of the knight, he seized upon his button. "One word, Sir Matthew, one word. You are too much of a man of business to think me troublesome. Respecting that little appointment that you were talking about the other day; I should like to have it settled. Because, to say the truth, I shall consider myself as wearing your livery—or, to speak more fitly, to be fighting positively under your colours, when this is done; and of course you know we ought to understand one another completely."

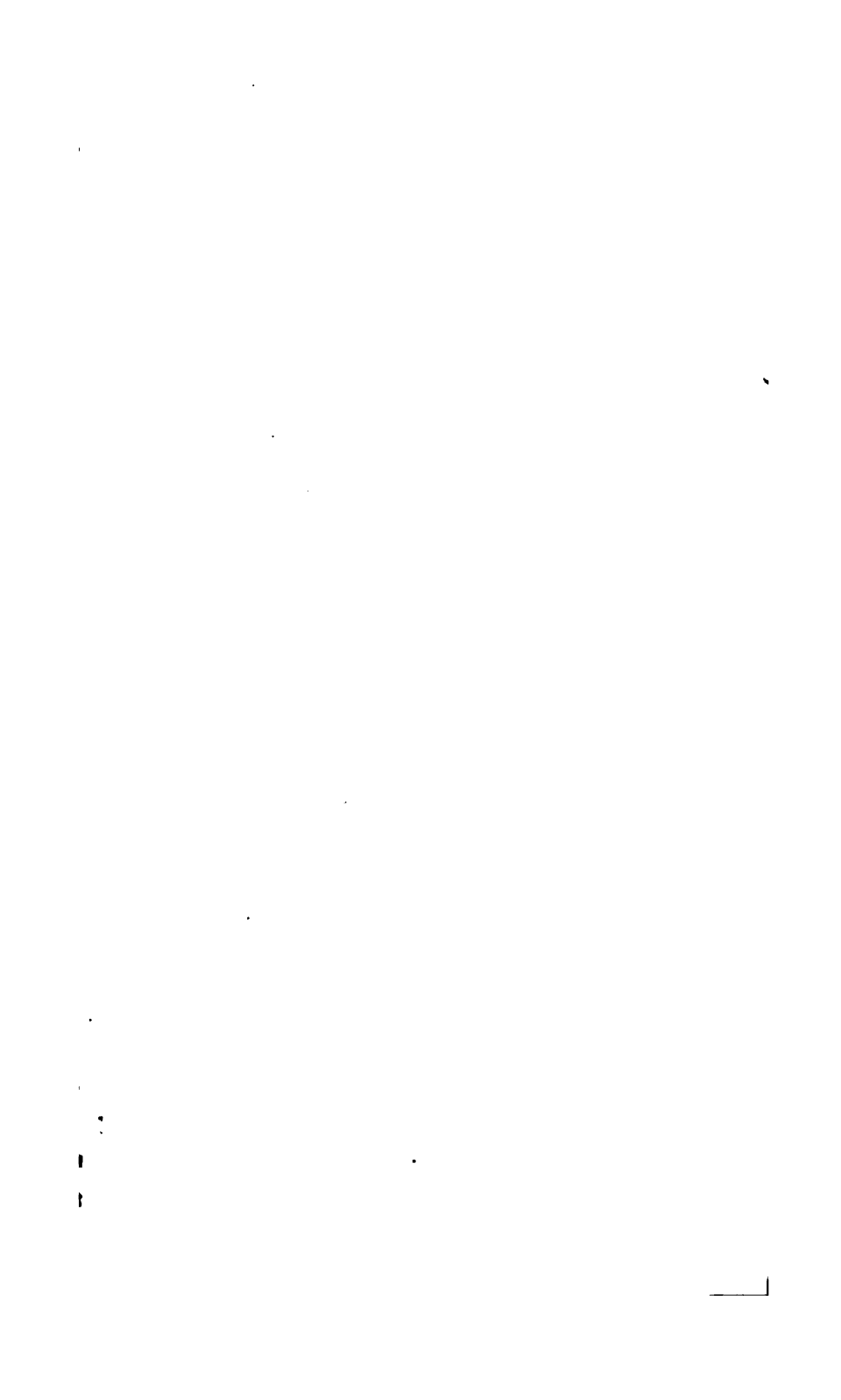
"No doubt of it, Crockley. I said nothing that I do not mean to stand to. You shall have two hundred a-year, paid quarterly, for attending to the health and well-being, and all that, you know, of the factory children. But, as I don't want you to give them two hundred pounds' worth of physic, remember I shall expect that you will make up the deficiency in—in just saying roundabout the neighbourhood how remarkably well everything goes on at Brookford Factory. I'll pledge you my word that everything does go on capitally well there, Crockley, so you will have nothing on your conscience on that score."

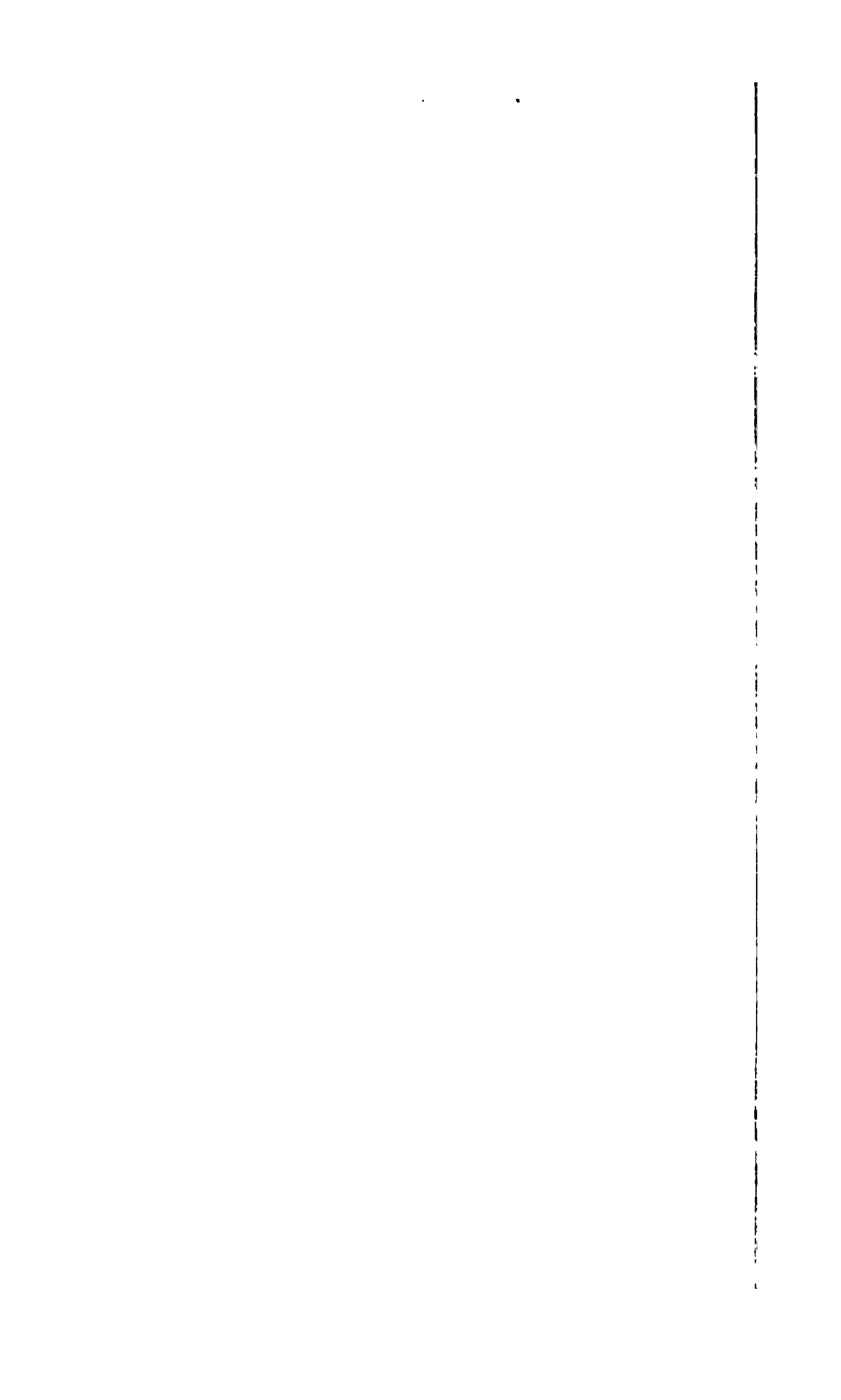
"I am not afraid of that, Sir Matthew; I know I may trust you. But I should like a bit of a memorandum about my own business, if you please."

"Quite right, quite right, sir. I am too much a man of business to object to that. Draw up the engagement, such as you wish it to be, and I dare say I shall make no objection to signing it."

After this a cordial hand-shaking was exchanged and the friends parted.

END OF VOL. I.





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